‘One thing I’d never stand for in a relationship is violence, so when she tried to kill me, that was it’: The impact of heteronormativity and assimilation on Domestic Violence and Abuse in same sex women’srelationships.

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Abstract

Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) is most commonly spoken of as a heterosexual issue and as such it remains hidden within the lesbian community both from the inside and the outside. In the era following civil partnership and same sex marriage legislation, it may be logical to assume that speaking out about abuse would be easier. However, this study suggests that the politics of assimilation has entrenched the hidden nature of domestic violence and abuse in same sex relationships between women making it more and more difficult to recognise or speak out about. Whilst recent research in the area has highlighted these issues, this study foregrounds, through the women's lived experience, the importance of structural, social and cultural contexts for women's identities resulting in limited recognition of abuse and consequential action on it.

The study contributes to the developing and existing body of literature through the exploration of the impact of heteronormativity on domestic violence and abuse in relationships between women in a specific age cohort (of one generation) who identify as gay. The results are presented in a narrative ethnographic thematic form, providing three women's in-depth stories of experiencing and surviving abusive relationships. From within these stories, it focuses on the use of identity in abuse, set against the backdrop of increasing political, legislative and social assimilation. Using the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* to inform the coding framework the study presents a theoretical conceptualisation of physical and emotional

abuse as coercive control and focuses on the difference of experience. The results enabled a theoretical conceptualisation of identity abuse and enabled the development of a new model for understanding identity abuse in relation to intersectional identities. Four key tactics areas emerged in relation to identity abuse: the known self (personal and public identity), intimacies, threats and false allegations. These key tactical areas are weaponised in personal, social and cultural, and structural domains of life. The critical inquiry presented is methodologically grounded in analytic autoethnography (with the researcher as full member participant) and utilises standpoint theory and intersectionality as conceptual framework. The study promotes the use of a new practitioner and educator model for understanding identity abuse to be used in conjunction with the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* and the stories themselves may also be used as tools for learning.

In an era of assimilation, research on the lived experience of domestic violence and abuse is key in understanding the nuances of experience based on identity; without this, practitioners and educators are limited in their ability to resource, raise awareness of, and assist those experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

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From three women to three women, whose memories are evoked by the courage displayed in these stories and to whom I proudly dedicate this study:

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Abbreviations

COHSAR	- Comparing heterosexual and same sex abuse in relationships
CPS	- Crown Prosecution Service
CSEW	- Crime Survey England and Wales
DVA	- Domestic Violence and Abuse
GBP	- Great Britain Parliament
IPV	- Interpersonal Violence
LGBTQ	- Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer
ONS	- Office for National Statistics
PAR	- Participatory Action Research
SSDVA	- Same-Sex Domestic Violence and Abuse
UK	- United Kingdom
US	- United States
USA	- United States of America
WHO	- World Health Organisation

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Altercasting	Redefining of a situation to focus on victim/survivor insecurities.
Appropriation	Adopting elements of a minority culture without understanding of the original culture and/or context.
Assimilation	The process of being absorbed into normative views, beliefs, structures and way of life.
Cis-gendered	A sense of personal identity and gender that matches with assigned sex at birth.
Citizenship	A concept based on rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities pertaining to full participation in society.
Collective	A group that share a common issue of interest, for example, the gay movement.
Community knowledge	Knowledge and perceptions within a community that may or may not accord with knowledge and perceptions outside of that community.
Discredited identity	An identity that is discredited and stigmatised through its visible membership of a marginalised community, for example, a Black identity.
Discreditable identity	An identity that is discreditable with potential for stigmatisation through its membership of an invisible marginalised community, for example, a gay identity or people experiencing metal health distress.
Dyadic Interviewing	A form of interviewing that is more like a conversation in which there is interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee rather than the interviewee simply answering questions. This form of interviewing acknowledges bias but instead embraces subjectivity and emotional responses to further understanding.

Term	Meaning
Gender	Socially constructed characteristics of masculinity and femininity ascribed according to assigned sex at birth and generally conflated with birth sex.
Hegemonic	Ruling or dominant socially, politically and/or culturally.
Heteronormative	A world view that heterosexuality is the natural and preferred order with associated gender norms. Men and women are sexually attracted to each other. Men and women look and act in stereotypically appropriate manners.
Heteropatriarchal	A socio-political system where cisgendered males have authority over cisgendered females.
Homonormativity	As heteronormative but where the only difference is attraction to someone of the same sex. All other values of heteronormativity are aligned.
Lesbian utopia	The idea, based on gender norms, that women in same sex relationships live in egalitarian relationships devoid of violence and/or abuse.
Neoliberalism	A political regime, emanating out of the liberal regime, in which the logic of the market supersedes everything else.
Politics	Of, or pertaining, to politics but also pertaining to cultural politics about attitudes, opinions and beliefs.
Practitioner	This term is used broadly to mean anyone who in the course of their work, in helping professions, works with people affected by domestic violence and abuse. Examples would include: social workers, domestic violence agency workers, counsellors, medical staff et cetera.
Weaponisation	The act of making something into a weapon.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Opening remarks

The last two decades have seen significant changes to the legislative and policy contexts of both domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and sexuality, supported by English (pertaining also to Wales) and Scots Law. The *Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004* (Great Britain Parliament (GBP), 2004a) acknowledged for the first time in legislation that DVA can take place in same sex relationships and between non co-habiting couples and thereby opened civil remedies to same-sex couples. In March 2013, following public consultation, the government adopted a broad definition of DVA that for the first time also incorporated 16 and 17 years old (Strickland and Allen, 2018). The governmental definition is:

> Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional.
>
> Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.
>
> Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim (www.gov.uk/government/news/new-definition-of-domestic-violence).

This definition is not currently a legal definition, however, *Section 76* of the *Serious Crime Act 2015* (Great Britain Parliament, 2015), created a new offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in familial or intimate relationships (Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), 2017).

The government appears resolute in dealing with DVA and, to this end, a 'landmark' draft domestic violence bill was published on 21st January 2019 (Gov.uk, 2019) albeit that there are few references in government strategy to LGBT victim/survivors of DVA (Barnes and Donovan, 2018). Indeed, the most recent strategy document, *Ending Violence against Women and Girls*, says more about the need of boys and men and female perpetrators than the needs of lesbians who have experienced DVA (GBP, 2016). This can be seen as part of a continuing pattern of the normalisation of heterosexuality through social policy as identified previously by Carabine (1996; 2004).

Changes in the legal and policy contexts of sexuality have been brought about through a raft of legislation, including notably, the *Civil Partnership Act 2004* (GBP, 2004b) and subsequently the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013* (GBP, 2013). These brought about formal legal rights of union for same sex couples. On the surface, such changes might appear to suggest societal transformation with deepening understanding of, and commitment to, social justice and inclusion. It could be assumed it would be easier to speak out about, and seek help, in relation to DVA from within a same sex relationship due to such changes, but yet in contrast with previous patterns of disclosure, LGBT victim/survivors often tell no-one about their abuse (Barnes and Donovan, 2018). This chapter presents the research problem explored by the study, provides a background to that problem and introduces the methodology and conceptual frameworks utilised. It

continues with a discussion of the use of language and articulates the purpose of the study. Finally, it presents a chapter by chapter overview.

1.2 The research problem and purpose

The largest group of individuals affected by DVA is heterosexual women (Smith *et al.*, 2010) and correspondingly, research has largely focused on them (Hester *et al.*, 2015). Attempting to assess the prevalence of DVA in same sex relationships is likely impossible (Donovan and Hester, 2014) and there has been vast variance in published prevalence rates (Barnes and Donovan, 2018). Nevertheless, the ground-breaking research of Renzetti (1992) in the USA, followed by Ristock (2002) in Canada, and Henderson (2003) in the UK, demonstrates, across continents, that abuse takes place in same sex relationships. In light of this knowledge, reliability of prevalence data should remain secondary to addressing it. Furthermore, quantitative data does not address 'context and impact' (Barnes and Donovan, 2018, p.69). For those experiencing DVA, context and impact are undoubtedly more important issues than prevalence.

Siebler (2016, p.4) postulates that 'coming of age as queer today is very different from coming of age in the 1970s' with young people looking to the internet for a sense of identity as an LGBT person. This is in stark contrast to an 'assertion of identity and community' that previously marked societal engagement (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001, p.14). For second wave feminists and the gay movement alike, the family historically was the site

of challenge. For some that brought the prospect of liberation and opportunities for progressive, non-orthodox forms of unity, whilst for others it brought the opportunity to pluralistically redefine family (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). Richardson and Monro (2012) suggest the assimilation of gay identities has occurred largely through citizenship campaigns that extolled the universality of love whether gay or heterosexual. Such assimilation whilst permitting marriage equality legislation has seemingly required acquiescence with the normative frameworks of gender and sexuality.

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the impact of heteronormativity and assimilation on surviving and help-seeking in same sex women's relationships characterised by DVA. Heteronormativity is a contested concept relating to the normalisation of heterosexuality. It includes both gender and sexuality norms. These norms are based on traditional social and cultural values in prevailing Western cultures. Such norms are that people are attracted to persons of the opposite sex and that those persons characteristics are gender aligned. Through this lens women are perceived as feminine looking, caring and nurturing, whilst men might be perceived as masculine, strong and logical, for example. The roots of the concept originate in Rich's (1980) notion of compulsory heterosexuality. Donovan and Hester (2014) set out a heteronormative construct of DVA using the term 'the public story of DVA'. There are three key aspects of the 'public story'. These are: the assumption of heterosexuality, an emphasis on physical

violence, and the gender normative presentation of DVA (this being that a smaller weaker woman is beaten by a big strong' man. The ramifications of such are explored further through this research.

Assimilation is also a contested concept. It relates to the idea of heteronormativity in that assimilation is about adhering with social and cultural values. Richardson and Monro (2012) would argue that it is a politics of belonging where members of minority groups adhere with the cultural and social values of the majority in order to have the status of citizen. Cooper (2004) suggests therefore that it is about individual's rights over collective rights and therefore is a politics of sameness. The concept of 'sameness' is also picked up on upon by Donovan and Hester (2014) who suggest that their respondents largely thought that their experiences of DVA were the same as heterosexual couplings and that it was the responses to it that may be different. This research therefore examines the intersecting identities of the participants through their historical, cultural and social contexts, the abuse perpetrated against them through their identity and their approach to assimilation.

This study focuses on the exploring the potential ramifications of this for gay women in relationships characterised by DVA. Donovan and Hester (2014) argue that what separates heterosexual women's experiences from gay people's experiences of DVA is abuse perpetrated on the basis of identity. The concept of identity is itself contested. Identity within this study

is taken as a social construct. It is viewed as the ongoing assimilation and integration of many and possible available cultural and social narratives into a purposeful life history and sense of self (Davis, 1996). Identity abuse is defined as, 'using sexuality and/or gender identity as a way of further controlling and/or undermining and isolating a victim/survivor' (Donovan and Hester, 2014, p.122).

Furthermore, definitions of DVA are complex and contested with multiple authors proffering differing definitions and typologies. Whilst the government offers a broad definition, scholarly debates remain in relation to what extent DVA should considered as incident based (generally physical violence) or understood through coercive control (which is more often a pattern of behaviours). The notion of coercive control and patterns of behaviour is crucial to this research as key in the work of Stark (2007) and Johnson (2008). The type of DVA examined is that which is between intimate partners, it is 'intimate terrorism' in which there is 'violence embedded in a general pattern of coercive control' (Johnson, 2008, p.2). The research focuses more upon the elements of coercive control than physical violence. Coercive control is used to secure the entitlement of the perpetrator, is ongoing and is part of a cumulative pattern of behaviour rather than incident based (Stark, 2007). These positions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

The research increases knowledge and understanding of DVA in same sex relationships between women. The study explores their social cultural contexts as women who grew up, and came of age in an era of legislative, structural social and cultural discrimination and oppression, alongside second wave feminism and gay activism primarily through the intersections of generation and socio-cultural location. It explores how identity abuse may function within the politics of assimilation and questions if this is the basis of the silence in the face of abuse. This study is based on a UK context involving participants from the UK and pertaining to law in England and Scotland. As an educator of UK practitioners my study needs to be of relevance to the UK.

1.3 An introduction to the methodology and conceptual framework

The paradigm within which this research sits is critical inquiry, drawing on the relativist ontological position epitomised by Crenshaw (1991). It utilises an analytic autoethnographic approach and draws on standpoint theory and intersectionality as conceptual framework. The study takes impetus from the concerns of the participants (Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987; Harding, 1991). Analysis strongly draws on the intersectionality of Collins and in doing so it resists an additive approach (Baca Zinn, 2012; Collins and Bilge, 2016) and embraces an intra- and inter- categorical approach (McCall, 2005).

Whilst I recognise the usefulness of studies that bring to light the structural and cultural inequalities of less represented intersectional identities, for example, non-white and non-able-bodied individuals, the study presented here focuses on white able-bodied women, who identify as gay, and who have all previously been in a civil partnership. The study examines micro level experiences in the context of macro level social, cultural and political structures. It sheds light on how power has produced social locations for the participants (Collins, 1995). This sets it apart from minority stress and psychological approaches and situates it as intersectional. The study does not consider individualistic responses, but rather locates participants' identities, experiences, relationships and responses within, and as a product of, their socio-cultural and socio-political contexts (Crenshaw, 1991).

I am aware of the critiques of Hill *et al.* (2012) and Kanuha (2013) regarding the over-representation of certain groups in preceding research, and to a larger extent, concur. However, I seek to ameliorate these concerns through an insider-outsider position that brings to the fore other voices that would not necessarily have the confidence to speak to researchers, are not of middle class, well-educated or monied groups (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Furthermore, in consensus with Barnes (2013b), research is much needed on the impact of civil partnerships and same sex marriage, which may in itself give rise to a certain homogeneity of participant: the mean age of women entering civil partnerships has never dipped below 37.9 years of

age as recorded in 2013 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (ONS, 2017) and there were more recorded same sex marriages between females than between males in all three years 2014-2016 (ONS, 2019).

1.4 The use of terms and language

The terminology in this study reflects the language of policy, the wider research field and the participants' standpoints. The term 'same sex' is generally used throughout regarding relationships. At times the terms 'gay' or 'lesbian' are used echoing the standpoints and self-determined identities of the participants. At other points terms used echo the literature that is under discussion. The term DVA is used throughout and infers the most serious kind of IPV, that is, coercively controlling violence, in line with arguments made by Donovan and Barnes (2019) who cite Myhill (2017) in articulating that different forms of IPV require different identification in order that they can be dealt with appropriately. Emotional abuse is used as an umbrella term throughout. It refers to abuse that is not physical, sexual or financial. It encompasses psychological abuse, identity abuse, entitlement abuse, intimidation coercion and other threats and other such abusive behaviours and tactics.

This thesis is about DVA in adult women's intimate relationships whilst recognising that the government definition of DVA includes other familial relationships (Home Office, 2013). The term 'community' is also used widely throughout. It is used, at times, as shorthand for the LGBT

community unless otherwise stated and should be thought of as fluid, intangible and, at times, notional, rather than fixed, locatable and a definable homogenous group.

It should be noted that although analytic autoethnography has been used as a vehicle, the use of the third person is mainly employed throughout this study (as discussed in sections 2.5 and 3.5(2)) particularly in Chapter 4 where verbatim participant quotes are used. The verbatim quotes include the occasional use of profanities. Corden and Sainsbury (2006) identified that it was probable that some researchers removed swearing from verbatim speech but also, and perhaps more tellingly, indicated that controlled language is more likely used in interviews by participants. The use of profanity in the interviews has, therefore, been taken as a sign of authenticity and a relaxed participant who felt able to speak as she felt. Further discussion of this aspect of data presentation is contained in section 3.5(4).

1.5 Overview of the study by chapter

Dealing with complexity including how to present it has been a challenge in this research, particularly with the constraints imposed by the word limit. This is a known challenge of multidimensional intersectional research (McCall, 2005). The study has been organised as follows:

Chapter 2 - The literature review brings together selected empirical topical literature with selected empirical literature on the experiences of marginalised sexual minorities, theoretical literature, legislation and grey literature, used as the justification for this research. Models for understanding are discussed with particular reference to Donovan and Hester's (2014) *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel*. The conceptual framework underpinning of the study is also discussed.

Chapter 3 - The methodology and method chapter sets out in detail my approach and its appropriateness for the research in question. It discusses intersectionality and the use of autoethnography. The use of the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* to inform coding is presented. Included in this chapter are important sections on ethics and relational ethics, which are at the heart of this study. The chapter concludes with articulation of how the quality of the study was assessed.

Chapter 4 - This chapter presents the results and interpretations. Stories using participants' voices are layered within narrative and interpretation. It begins with contextual biographical information and proceeds into three separate accounts of physical violence in the three relationships (ongoing, sporadic, and one three-day episode). From this point, it departs into analytical thematic integrated accounts of emotional abuse. The chapter proceeds into consideration of identity and sense of belonging before demonstrating how the participants' identities are used against them in

relation to intimacies, friends and friendships, family and external heteronormalised worlds. Relationship rules of the victim/survivor are identified. 'Relationship rules' are a term coined by Donovan and Hester and are discussed further in section 2.4(2). Notably, the chapter presents a model derived from the data for a systematic conceptualisation of identity abuse for use by practitioners, educators and victim/survivors.

Chapter 5 - This chapter contextualises the results and interpretations. The discussion is presented in symmetry with the results and interpretations chapter to create ease in referring between them. The results are discussed in relation to extant literature and wider socio-cultural contexts. An intra- and inter- categorical approach is used to examine individual experiences in the context of social, cultural and political structures. Arguments are presented around assimilation, neoliberalism, and the social, cultural and historic norms of heterosexual relationships. The relationship rules participants brought to the relationships are paralleled against the relationship rules of the perpetrator.

Chapter 6 - This chapter provides conclusions and presents a discussion of the limitations of the research. It highlights original contributions to academic and professional knowledge and original contributions to practice. Focus is given to indicating future directions for research, policy and practice. The chapter offers closing remarks in reflection on the study

undertaken, specifically in relation to intersectionality. Finally, an epilogue is offered on behalf of the participants.

1.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the research problem that the study seeks to address. It has introduced a number of themes salient in the research and justified the research question. The chapter has addressed terminology used in the research and has introduced the methodological and conceptual frameworks used. An overview of each chapter has been provided outlining some of the key arguments made in them.

I invite you to share emic perspectives on the impact of heteronormativity and assimilation on domestic violence and abuse in same sex women's relationships.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review brings together selected topical literature with selected empirical literature on the experience of marginalised sexual minorities, theoretical literature, legislation and grey literature, used as the justification for this research. In doing so it situates my research within the literature and forms the background and context of my research findings and interpretations from within existing research on the topic (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010). Sandberg and Alvesson (2011) articulate a number of ways in which new research might fill gaps in existing research. They articulate that gaps in bodies of knowledge might be filled by drawing conclusions from empirical research and theoretical literature that are not typically used together. A challenge of this study is that the lesbian in an abusive relationship is at the nexus of many discursive positions. This creates a challenge as to how to make visible that power.

In order to address the challenge posed by exploring the impact of heteronormativity in relationships between women that are characterised by DVA, the literature review draws upon interdisciplinary theoretical and empirical literature pertaining to historical contexts and the concept of sexual citizenship. This approach has been termed as complexity theory, wherein theories and concepts, in this case, sociological theory and research on same sex DVA, is abutted with pertinent concepts and theory drawn from other disciplines (such as social psychology, human geography,

and education) in order to gain new insights (Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012).

Dealing with many levels of complexity has required structuring. A structured literature review is a 'systematic method of defining, collating and analyzing a corpus of studies' (Nichols and Stahl, 2019, p.1257). Furthermore, a structured literature review defines the boundaries of the review; often with boundaries that are topical, temporal and methodological as is the case herein (Nichols and Stahl, 2019). The chapter is divided into three main sections (with subsections) focusing mainly on:

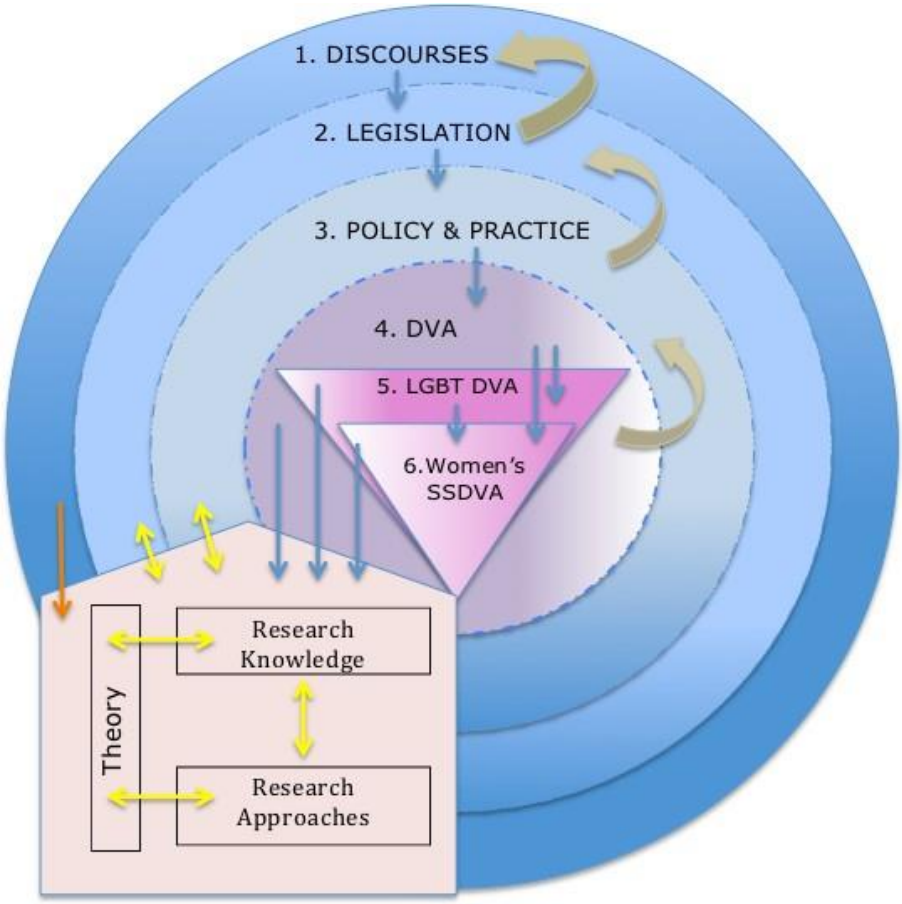
- Historical, legal and social contexts;
- A topical review of sociological literature on the subject of same sex DVA (with a focus on women's relationships where possible); and,
- Research approaches and conceptual framework.

The first section sets the scene contextually with theoretical and empirical literature. The topical review, in the second section, involves an iterative approach. The final aspect of the review focuses on the research approaches and conceptual frameworks underpinning this research, in particular, intersectionality. A diagram is provided (p.16) to further illustrate the relationships between the literature and the discussion.

An iterative process is in line with an inductive, open-minded approach to research (Hart, 1998). For me, the process involved monitoring the field for new research and revisiting the research with different perspectives gained from exploring wider theoretical perspectives and broader literature on the subject of sexual minority marginalisation. This extended the breadth and depth of the topical review undertaken for the initial research proposal. Although I have adopted an interpretive grounded style approach to data analysis (see Chapter 3), there is a difference between open-minded research approaches and approaching research with an empty head (Dey, 1999; 2007; Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). An iterative approach has come to be regarded as good practice (Charmaz, 2006b; Lempert, 2007; Feak and Smales, 2009; Hart, 2010) as it enables a balance between understanding the theoretical discourses in the field and operating on the basis of preconceived ideas, which may hamper the development of knowledge (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Lempert, 2007).

Figure 1: Structure of the literature review

This diagram represents the flow of what is captured in the literature review. However, it is acknowledged that it is not as neat and tidy as the presentation suggests. For instance, there are issues pertaining to DVA in trans populations and for gay men that are not central or pertinent in SSDVA between women.



1. Discourses: Particular attention is given to heteronormativity, gender (patriarchy), love, feminism, lesbian utopia, and political (neoliberalism) and socio-legal discourse.
2. Legislation: Legislation has been drawn on around sexuality, marriage and some pertaining to DVA.
3. Policy and practice is understood broadly and includes policy and practice of the police, health services, counselling, DVA services and social work/care.
4. DVA: Heterosexual
5. LGBT DVA: DVA for all people under the umbrella term of LGBT.
6. Women's DVA is subsumed in LGBT: DVA for women perpetrated in same-sex relationships between women.

The triangular shape indicated the funneling of research from broad to narrow whilst the circles surrounding represent containment in the larger whole.

2.2 Historical, legal and social contexts

A purposeful presentation is made of a critical, historical overview of the legal, political and socio-cultural context of the identity of gay women drawing on a given historical context (circa 1970 onwards). This is to elucidate the social context of participants involved in this study, thus providing a backdrop to the discourses visible in the UK context. It is through this context that the participants make sense of themselves (Davies, 1996). Discourse here is understood as given knowledge, on a given topic, in a given time. Discourse is a Foucaultian concept about power that exists outside of (but in a reciprocal relationship with) legal frameworks, policy and practice; it is about social and cultural power (Foucault, 2002 [1969]). Discourse has been defined as 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic at a particular historic moment' (Hall, 2001, p.72) but has also been more widely defined as the accepted way of seeing the world (Doherty, 2007). Discourse, in this research, is seen as integrative and framing (as represented in the diagram (p.16).

Heterosexuality and the accompanying gender binarism (with normative gender roles) form the dominant sexual identity discourses in the UK (Richardson and Monro, 2012). In order to understand the impact of heteronormativity in relationships between women that are characterised by DVA, I need to explore the past and present socio-cultural contexts in

which identity formation took and takes place. This is in major part explored through the arrival of 'the sexual citizen' (Weeks, 1998). There is an extensive history to gay rights in the UK, which is summarised here with emphasis on the oscillating political ethos and goals of related periods of activism. It is acknowledged that there are differences in experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans peoples and the approach here is more broad brush in attempting to highlight the legislative positions and socio-cultural locations of the participants in this research.

Activism of the 1960s was conservative in its approach and sought tolerance of homosexuality (Richardson and Monro, 2012). This approach successfully led to the *Sexual Offences Act 1967 (*GBP*,* 1967*)* which decriminalised homosexual acts in private between two men aged 21 and over. This decade gave way to a more radical 1970s for the women's liberation movement (Mackay, 2015) and gay movements (Adam, 1994; Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). In many respects the political activism of the 1970s carried through into the 1980s, but a citizenship agenda also developed aided by neoliberalism and the HIV epidemic. The agenda of political movements for feminism and the gay movement was not based on seeking toleration and acceptance, but instead, societal transformation to a new and egalitarian society that had overthrown capitalism and patriarchy (Weeks, 2005; 2007; Moore, 2010). This resonates with Giddens' (1992) notion of 'confluent love' in which women

aspired to a different type of relationship and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943).

Critics of such movements argued that collective movements were essentialist; homogenising and universalising the experiences of women and people of sexual minority (Richardson and Monro, 2012). The period was marked by 'oscillation' between 'a moment of transgression' (the subversion of norms) and 'a moment of citizenship' (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001, p.14). The goal of transgression was to critique the existing order whilst citizenship claims arose in the struggle for relational rights, heightened by the HIV epidemic (Heaphy, Weeks and Donovan, 1999). These might be termed (respectively) as oppositional and assimilationist agendas.

Weeks (2007, p.XIII) argued that same sex unions had queered traditional concepts of marriage and was not an 'accommodation of heteronormativity or neo-liberalism'. He argues that both assimilationist politics and oppositional politics needed to exist within activism. However, the perils of neoliberalism are a theme in the work of the period, with the right to participate in the consumer economy for people of marginalised sexuality being the subject of the work of Evans (1993) who argued that rights are expressed through participation in the market. Bell and Binnie (2000) shared this view, articulating that the power an individual had in society was directly related to their economic power.

2.2(1) The 'good' sexual citizen

Richardson (2017) suggests the concept of citizenship was used to further the struggle for equality and social justice. This led to a bringing together of the discourses around sexuality and citizenship. Sexual citizenship might be defined as relating to people who 'either construct, or are allocated their identities around gender and who subsequently find themselves excluded from hegemonic understandings of citizenship' (Donovan, Heaphy and Weeks, 1999, p.693). The concept of sexual citizenship emerged in the UK in the 1990s, with key analyses by Evans (1993), Plummer (1995; 2005), Richardson (1998) and Weeks (1998). Citizenship comprises of both rights and responsibilities (Weeks, 1998). However, full participation in society, with legal and social benefits, has historically revolved around heterosexual family life (Richardson, 1998; Donovan, Heaphy and Weeks, 1999). Furthermore, Carabine (1996) argues that heterosexuality and its normative frameworks were used to control women's sexuality, directly through legislation and indirectly through the assumption of heterosexuality.

The concept of citizenship as a vehicle for equality was not without its critics. One of the most vocal critics was Duggan (2002) who gave rise to the term 'homonormativity'. Homonormativity is a term that means to live by heteronormative standards with the exception of having same sex relationships. Duggan (2002) linked sexual citizenship with neoliberalism.

Her criticism was that a politics based on citizenship and individualism 'does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them by promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (Duggan, 2002, p.179). In other words, claims to rights (relational or otherwise), came to be seen alongside the necessity to cede to the duties of heteronormative frameworks. Stychin (2006) supports this view further through an analysis concluding that the *Civil Partnership Act 2004* (GBP, 2004b) should be read in the context of neoliberalism and the privatisation of care-giving, whereby a legal partner replaces the hitherto role of the state.

Similarly, Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001, p.42) had from the point of view of gender and sexuality, observed a 'hierarchical positioning' of heterosexuality and normalising frameworks in socio-political contexts that had marginalising consequences. Put differently, to be granted rights one needs to be a "good' sexual citizen' (Richardson and Monro, 2012, p.1). This entails living as cis-gendered[1], monogamously, being 'ordinary' and the 'same' as others in society with the one exception of a differing sexuality. This is summed up neatly by Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, (2001, p.13) who state that 'the sexually outlawed are regularly forced to live in at least two worlds: of outward conformity, and of secret transgression'.

[1] A term meaning people whose gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth.

2.2(2) The politics of assimilation

The combination of assimilationist and oppositional politics observable through the 1980s and 1990s led to changes in the legislative landscape post 1990. In 1992, the World Health Organization (WHO) declassified same sex attraction as mental illness (World Health Organization, 1992). The age of consent was reduced to 18 with the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 199*4 (GBP, 1994) and subsequently to 16 in 2001 with the *Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000* (GBP, 2000). The *Adoption and Children Act 2002* (GBP, 2002) brought rights for same sex couples to apply to adopt togethe*r.* Following this, the first legal unions for people of the same sex came into place with the *Civil Partnership Act 2004* (GBP, 2004b) which was followed less than a decade later by the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013* (GBP, 2013).

The legislative trajectory was not all positive, however. The infamous *Section 28* of the *Local Government Act 1988* (GBP, 1988) was introduced (in 1988) and not repealed until 2003 (2000 in Scotland). This section stipulated that 'a local authority shall not - (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (1991) argue that the imposition of *Section 28* was a key moment that politicised, mobilised and united non-heterosexual

communities in activism. The impact of *Section 28* was more cultural than legal; Donovan and Hester (2014) observe that the legacy of *Section 28* continues in and through sex education advice and guidelines in schools and further education colleges. Whilst most legislation (pertaining to marginalised groups) in the latter half of the 20th century chimed with increasing rights, this discriminatory legislation sent an unequivocal message through not only its content, but its imposition too. This position is supported by multiple researchers in education (for example, Nixon and Givens, 2007; Greenland and Nunney, 2008; Edwards, Brown and Smith, 2016).

Richardson and Monro (2012) state that the politics that emerged in the 1990s were the politics of belonging, otherwise called the politics of assimilation. They assert that the politics of assimilation are a politics of 'fitting in' or adhering to norms and normalising structures. The politics of assimilation assert individuals' rights over collective rights and equality, and therefore requires sameness (Cooper, 2004). Furthermore, the equality that is being sought is with the hegemonic order, that is, in the case of sexuality, with heterosexuality. Whilst successes have been achieved socially and legislatively, there are unintended outcomes of such an approach; certain other groups, such as bisexual and transgendered people are more marginalised (Cooper, 2004). However, Donovan and Hester (2014, p.67), drawing upon Seidman, Meeks and Traschen (1999), state that 'white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual intimate and familial

relationships … have become the gold standard … against which alternative ways of living and loving are compared'. Any research that is focused upon understanding DVA in the relationships of gay women (and particularly those pertaining to this particular historical period) should therefore include understanding of the impact of this socio-cultural context.

Temporal issues based on historical socio-cultural contexts can be compounded by spatial issues. Geographical location impacts on an individual's lived experience of sexuality. Living in a rural community may lead to trying to remain invisible, being more isolated, fearing homophobia, feeling a lack of privacy and a lack of structural services (Bell and Valentine, 1995; McCarthy, 2000) with increasing severity on a continuum from suburban to rural (Bell and Valentine, 1995). This, in part, may arise out of parts of the community fearing the loss of their own values and cultural norms (Tiemann, 2006).

Furthermore, living a meaningful existence and feeling a sense of belonging in an urban area might be particularly challenging for older gay people. Multiple aspects and processes of exclusion from the commercialised urban gay scene are identifiable. Lesbians and gay men are, and can be, excluded from urban gay spaces on the basis of being disabled, older, female, poor, or being perceived to be unattractive based on hegemonic discourses of gender and attractiveness (Casey, 2007). The urban gay scene is constructed around the dominant norms of neoliberalism including

heterosexuality, linking in with Duggan's (2002) concept of homonormativity. Previously, the gay scene was regarded as a place of solidarity and safety with people who were 'family' (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001).

The notion of family is of importance, not only because it is the organising principle of intimate lives, but also because gendered discourses have been seen to have affected young lesbians through their upbringing. Muller (1987) contemporaneously suggested that young lesbians were growing up in a time of cultural, social and political subjugation. Lesbian daughters were often less well received by parents than gay sons. Moreover, gay people experience a lack of a sense of belonging. Often the parental home is where gay people learn to 'pass' (as straight) (Muller, 1987, cited in Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001, p.93). Collins (2019, p.236) too, takes her analysis of the family beyond intimate live and argues that 'ideas about family form the bedrock of all societies'.

Valentine and Skelton (2003) found that when parental expectations of their child are bound up in expectations of marriage and parenthood their reaction to their child coming out was negative. This may impact on the young persons' sense of self beyond the family home leaving them with eroded esteem and loss of confidence. Living at home in a parental context creates further challenges for young people in relation to DVA when they are unable to be open about their sexuality (Donovan and Hester, 2008).

It is clear that discourses operate both inside and outside of the family home and act to shape and delineate future beliefs and actions. This is true both of the individual in their circumstances and of those they encounter in all of their 'worlds'.

As adults in family life, members of the LGBT community may experience alienation or assimilation in family units and other aspects of social life. Valentine, Piekut and Harris (2015) found that most families will do emotion work to assimilate difference (different ethnicity, religion, sexuality from the family of origin) in the intimate lives of a family member. They found it may increase tolerance of that very specific difference in the wider society. However, they found that toleration did not extend to other marginalised groups. Some families would only accept the difference privately provided that it was 'not normalised, displayed or converted in extra-familial public contexts' (Valentine, Piekut and Harris, 2015, p.292). This is close to the position of religious organisations where Valentine *et al.* (2013, p.169) found tolerance of homosexuality provided that LGBT members behaved in a 'relatively closeted' manner by not 'displaying their sexual orientation publicly through dress, manner, [and] displays of affection' for example.

From the other dimension of parental contexts; gay women in the era preceding matrimonial legislative equality experienced losing custody of their children due to sexuality. Sexuality was considered in custodial matters (Smith, 2006). Those growing up or those without children bore

witness to it and/or campaigned against it (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). Following legislative changes on legal unions (in the form of the *Civil Partnership Act 2004* (GBP, 2004b)) unsurprisingly a case about parenting came to the fore in the UK. The landmark case (*Re G*, 2006) centred on two gay women (a biological mother and her partner) and two children conceived through artificial insemination. Initially, a ruling was made in favour of the non-biological parent, but this was overturned by the House of Lords establishing 'biological privilege' in family law, but irrespective of the outcome, presaging the way for new understandings of what constitutes 'family' in law (Smith, 2006).

Another legislative change of this period was affording adults in same sex relationships the same protections as couples in heterosexual relationships through the *Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004* (GBP, 2004a). However, divorce laws remain unreformed since the *Matrimonial Causes Act 1973* (GBP, 1973). The laws governing divorce remain based on patriarchal gendered relationship norms, despite changed legislation governing other areas of family life.

The politics of 'fitting in' is about belonging in all spheres of life: from whom you are, your relationships, and to how you function within them. In other words, in order for gay people to belong in a range of environments, they may need to negotiate them differently: with parents, grandparents or children (including adult children), extended family, friends, the gay scene

or other social scenes, together with external worlds of educational establishments and/or work environments amongst others. Gay people will need to negotiate these environments and belonging in relation to social norms and: gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, (dis)ability, class, physical location, faith background, and others, according to their own personal biographies. The way these aspects of life intersect to shape, maintain, and reproduce marginalisation and inequity is what Collins (1990) named the matrix of domination, but are also otherwise known as 'vectors of oppression and privilege' (Ritzer and Stepinisky, 2014, p.204).

2.2(3) Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA): Discourses

Alongside changing contexts for people in sexual minorities, there were changing contexts in terms of perceptions around DVA. Second wave feminists were crucial in politically framing the experiences of women as a result of patriarchy, including violence, both in the home and outside of it (Mackay, 2015). This framing was so powerful that the discourse of DVA became centred on DVA as a heterosexual problem, wherein a stronger male abuses a weaker female (Barnes, 2010; Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014; Barnes and Donovan, 2016). Furthermore, despite its many accomplishments in the liberation of women, the unintended outcome of feminism has been the perpetuation of the pervasive myth of women as non-violent, and of the ideal of a 'lesbian utopia' in which egalitarian relationships are the norm, with violence and abuse precluded (Barnes,

2010). Even women's narratives about recovery from DVA have been impacted on by feminism and neoliberalism (Barnes, 2013a).

Physical violence has been privileged until very recently; changes to legislation that include coercive and controlling behaviour came into force in December 2015 (Strickland and Allen, 2018). Furthermore, the impetus for such changes has come from years of feminist campaigning which, ironically, has reinforced the heteronormative assumptions about DVA (Barnes, 2013a; 2013b; Todd, 2013; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

2.2(4) Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA): Scholarly debates

Physical violence was at the centre of English law until the new governmental definition of DVA and the Section 76 offence of 'coercive and controlling behaviour' (Great Britain Parliament, 2015). Stark (2018) argues that three factors were pivotal in the changes: the failure of the criminal justice 'assault model', international pressures and a feasible alternative coercive control framework as a response to DVA. Stark (2018) suggests that since the mid 1990s empirical literature had demonstrated that DVA could not be understood through individual incidents but rather presented a pattern. Furthermore, women's experiences of DVA tactics of control as being more oppressive than physical violence, albeit that Stark's (2018) focus is male violence against women. Stark (2018, p.21) regards coercive control models as 'paradigmatic alternative' to the assault model.

The feminist and sociological *Duluth Power and Control Wheel* (*Duluth Model*), featuring male privilege, became the most widely used model in services and shelters. Bohall, Bautista and Musson (2016) articulate that the *Duluth Model* remains the predominant model and critique it from a wide variety of perspectives but particularly in relation to its scope. The *Duluth Model* is centred on experiences of white, heterosexual women with white male perpertrators nor does it account for typologies of DVA (Bohall, Bautista and Musson, 2016). Whilst the model remains useful for its focus on power and control, Bohall, Bautista and Musson (2016, p.1032) call for a 'conclusive theory that includes the known origins (typologies/models) of IPV coupled with the flexibility to address the variances among the various diversity variables (culture, gender, race, sexuality, etc.)'. This position seems to uncritically accept the typologies available.

The typologies most readily available are those provided by Johnson (2008) and these are 'intimate terrorism', 'violent resistance', 'mutual violent control', and 'situational couple violence' (sometimes called 'common couple violence'). 'Intimate terrorism' is the type of DVA that involves one partner in abusing the other through power and control, includes physical violence is likely to escalate to have serious consequences It is a pattern of behaviours. 'Violent resistance' is where the victim/survivor acts in retaliation or self-defence and may result in injury. 'Mutual violent control' is where both partners are engaging in behaviours associated with 'intimate terrorism' to battle for control in the relationship. Lastly, 'situational couple

violence' is where sporadic violence may be a feature of the relationship but it is not about asserting control and is deemed unlikely to escalate or result in serious injury.

Whilst Johnson's typology is widely used it has, in turn, been critiqued. Meier (2015) argues that Johnson relies upon existing data sets that are flawed with the result that situational couple violence appears more common than it is and less injurious. The result, due to the seismic uptake of the model in family courts (based in the USA), is precarious decision making in relation to the custody of children (Meier, 2015). In particular, Meier (2015) takes issue with the distinct types proffered by Johnson. Meier (2015) takes issue with the notion that 'intimate terrorism' is rare. In particular, she raises the issue of violence in couples of higher socio-economic status. Drawing upon Waits (1998), Wiseman (2000) and Stark (2006) the argument is made that control may be more extreme whilst the physical violence is less (Meier, 2015).

For Stark (2007) DVA is a pattern of behaviours aimed at controlling the victim/survivor and this control is the defining feature of the DVA. At that time and in keeping with feminist discourses Stark (2007) perceives this always to be as part of an unequal gendered heterosexual relationship. However, Stark and Hester (2019) review the literature on coercive control and conclude that the 'studies [reviewed] lay the groundwork for reconceptualizing coercive control as a strategy for establishing dominance

across a spectrum of relationships'. The work of Stark (2007) and Johnson's (2008) typology of intimate terrorism inform this research, notwithstanding the comments above. The position taken within this research is that DVA is not incidents of physical violence but a pattern of behaviours with the purpose of controlling the victim. Physical violence may be used routinely or be very limited as the impetus is control with the perpetrator engaging in whatever she feels necessary to gain and maintain control.

2.3 Search strategy

The search strategy detailing the scoping search for the topical literature (based principally on DVA and women's same sex relationships) is provided in Appendix 11. I used an iterative approach (as previously discussed) and snowballing strategy from the reference lists of these studies together with a small number of author searches (Ridley, 2012; Badenhorst, 2015; 2018).

2.4 Review of the topical literature

This section of the literature review draws upon selected key empirical research that is mainly sociological in approach and focuses on cohorts that include women in same sex relationships that are characterised by DVA. This body of literature is best suited to exploring women's views of their own experiences, their complexities and nuances in the context of women's lived experiences in their own social locations (Donovan and Barnes, 2017). Social locations might be shaped, maintained and reproduced by many

vectors such as gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, geographical location et cetera. The intersection of those axes of marginalisation or oppression and how those forms of oppression converge increases the oppression in nuanced ways (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Collins, 1998). The studies utilised were brought together with other studies that were foundational in providing insight into experiences associated with sexual minority status. This approach is in keeping with Nichols and Stahl (2019, p.1255) who suggest such an approach to literature reviewing is about making a 'principled decision to direct analysis towards addressing key questions about how inequity is experienced'.

As stated in the introduction this study is based on a UK context. However, this does not mean that international studies are not of relevance; the UK is one of many liberal regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Critical social work traverses national boundaries, explores and engages with challenges faced in other countries, particularly those of liberal regimes (Baines, 2016). The studies reviewed emanate from a number of countries (see appendix 11 for further discussion of inclusion and exclusion criteria). Most of the studies used small purposive and/or convenience samples for which there are methodological reasons, not least that the general population cannot be asked a minority population question (Weston, 2004; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Barnes and Donovan, 2018). The studies reviewed show little disparity in relation to key issues.

Analysing and synthesising the content of the literature thematically and inductively resulted in the identification of three broad themes (and respective sub-themes) in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic data analysis. The results present a 'new and integrative interpretation of the findings that are more substantive than those resulting from individual investigation' (Fingheld, 2003, p.894) and informed the direction of this research. The three themes identified were recognising abuse, silence, and seeking help. The themes are independently considered although they are interdependent and mutually shaping.

2.4(1-1) Recognising abuse

There are many similarities in the experiences of abuse for women in same sex relationships and heterosexual relationships (Ristock, 2002; Donovan and Hester, 2014). However, women in same sex relationships often do not recognise that they are subject to abuse (Giorgio, 2002; Donovan *et al.*, 2006; Irwin, 2006; 2008; Barnes, 2008; Walters, 2011; McDonald, 2012; Donovan and Hester, 2008; 2010; 2014). The reasons for this given in the literature are complex and interwoven, but predominately relate to the discourse of DVA, which in turn relies upon heteronormative discourses. The discourse of DVA is crucial in shaping recognition and responses to abuse. Donovan and Hester (2014) draw on Jamieson (1998) in calling this the 'public story' of DVA. This terminology has been adopted in recent UK research (for example, Donovan, Barnes and Nixon, 2014; Barnes and Donovan, 2016; Donovan and Barnes, 2017).

The previous section has shown that the public story of DVA is that there is a male perpetrator and a weaker female victim, and notably, there is an emphasis on physical violence (Donovan and Hester, 2014). The public story also infers that DVA is a heterosexual problem and that women are not violent. Furthermore, it is absorbed by everyone including those experiencing abuse, friends, families, medical and social practitioners and other more formal agencies such as the police and social services.

These are themes that have also been identified in past research using differing terminology. Giorgio (2002) and Duke and Davidson (2009) use the term 'myths' in relation to the idea of women as incapable of violence. Giorgio (2002), in her autoethnographic qualitative study, highlights that practitioners and victim/survivors alike believe this gendered myth. This theme has been taken up most notably by Barnes (2008; 2010). Barnes (2010) discusses the issue with particular reference to women who had experienced the lesbian feminism of the 1970s and 1980s. Responses to abuse perpetrated by a woman were often 'shock and disbelief' due to the 'pervasive' notion that women are not violent (Barnes, 2010, p.237).

Barnes (2010) discusses the belief amongst lesbians of a lesbian utopia of egalitarian relationships. Women were left unable to understand the abuse in their relationships resulting in self-blame. Although acknowledging that self-blame is something that heterosexual women experience too, Barnes (2010) argues that the level of perceived failure may be higher for lesbian

women due to a failure to live up to the lesbian feminist ideology. Furthermore, this is compounded by a lack of an explanatory framework. The myth of a lesbian utopia is arguably seen as a discourse of lesbianism and is a feature in other research (Hassouneh and Glass, 2008; Irwin, 2008; Duke and Davidson, 2009; Walters, 2011; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

The notion that DVA is predominantly a heterosexual problem and the void of language available to explain it left those women who had been abused by women feeling fraudulent in their claims, particularly in the absence of substantial physical injuries (Barnes, 2008). In addition, gender expectations created issues for women who perceived themselves to be more masculine and these women found it harder to speak of their experiences of victimisation because of gendered roles and expectations (Barnes, 2008). The gender of the abuser and hegemonic discourses give rise to the question of what 'counts' as abuse or DVA (Barnes, 2008; Irwin, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

The discourse, based on the physical nature of abuse, is extremely problematic given that emotional violence is the most common form of abuse experienced in SSDVA between women (Irwin, 2008; St Pierre and Senn, 2010; Donovan and Hester, 2011a; 2014). Whilst physical violence is readily and easily identifiable, emotional abuse is the hardest form of abuse to identify (Barnes, 2008; Irwin, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Emotional abuse can be simply mistaken for a relationship not working (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2006; 2008; Walters, 2011; Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014).

A further central discourse identified in the literature is that of love. Discourses of love and gender are inextricably intertwined. Donovan and Hester (2011b; 2014) suggest that heterosexuality is predicated on ideas of masculinity and femininity; young males seek sexual satisfaction, whilst femininity is constructed around romance, love and relationships. This is differently regulatory for the differing genders. The discourse of gender (and gender presentation) is not fixed and resonates differently in axes (such as class and geographical location as indicated in section 2.2). Such discourses can lead to women (specifically) believing that loving their partner enough and sticking it out would 'fix' them (Irwin, 2006; McDonald, 2012; Donovan and Hester, 2014). This is further shaped by the gendered discourses that suggest that women are not violent: not only are women incapable of violence, discursively they are tender, supportive and loving (Walters, 2011; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

A gendered discourse of this type may extend to supporting an abusive partner who discloses historical abuse. A disclosure of this type can generate sympathy and allow blame to be redirected (McDonald, 2012; Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014). Standing by your partner, loving them unconditionally, being loyal and trying to work through problems together

are parts of the hegemonic normative discourse of love. This can in part, account for the redirection of blame and the need for an abused partner to care for the person abusing them (Irwin, 2006; Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014; Donovan, Barnes and Nixon, 2014). Furthermore, the discursive construction of victims as weak and needy contrasted with respondents in Donovan and Hester's (2010) study understanding of themselves as strong and supportive thus meaning they are less likely to see themselves as victims. Emotional violence together with the discourse of love acted to obscure recognition of abuse (Donovan and Hester, 2010). Moreover, Donovan and Hester (2014, p.196) found that women were significantly more likely to 'try harder' in relationships as a response to abuse than men (either in heterosexual or same sex relationships).

Collins (1990) articulates that oppression not only runs along different axes such as class, sexuality and ethnicity but it is structured on different levels: personal, community (or group) and structural. Family cultures may impact upon how individuals negotiate the discourses of love, DVA and heteronormativity. Collins (1990, p.227) argues that 'human ties' can be 'confining and oppressive'. The intersectional approach of Donovan and Hester (2014, p.59) is clearly demonstrated by their argument that it is not only sexuality that shapes personal and intimate lives, but so too do 'gendered expectations' about how people might behave in the differing spheres of their lives: as adult child, a parent, a partner, an employee or in other structural settings, for example, as a service user.

This can be argued both of contemporaneous and past familial relationships, including abusive relationships. Indeed, prior experiences of abuse may impact on the recognition of abuse. Coming to an abusive relationship with a history of childhood abuse may make women more vulnerable, less able to recognise abuse and therefore more likely to remain in abusive relationships (Giorgio, 2002; Donovan and Hester, 2010; McDonald, 2012). Both discourses of gender (Irwin, 2006; Barnes, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2014) and love (Irwin, 2006; Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2011a; 2014) make it more unlikely that abuse is reported to the police even when recognised.

It is clear that there are similarities in the heterosexual and same sex experiences of DVA regarding the recognition of abuse. It has been demonstrated that being in a same sex relationship and being female problematises further recognition. The next theme focuses on the issue of silence beginning with contextualising the issue of being, or not being able to be, open about sexuality.

2.4(1-2) Silence

There are a number of reasons why gay women may remain silent about their experience of abuse - if they recognise it. Central to the issue for some gay women is being able to be open about sexuality or being 'out', as it is commonly referred to. This however is also complex. Being out in one part of life does not necessarily mean being out in all parts of life (Donovan and

Hester, 2014). One may be able to be out at home, for example, but not at work; although this again can be linked to negotiating different levels of structuration. There are additional pressures from a perceived need to 'pass' as straight in certain areas of your life. It may arguably be more challenging for women who are more masculine in presentation and who may not 'pass' as straight. Kanuha (1999) links passing as heterosexual with fitting in with gendered expectations rather than sexuality and argues that 'passing' or attempting to conceal aspects of your identity is a necessary part of the lives of gay people. Sexuality as a 'tool of control' is immensely powerful (Donovan *et al.*, 2006, p.15).

Todd (2013), in her qualitative study involving 25 lesbians, found that working-class spaces are associated with violence, whilst Richardson and Monro (2012), in their research on local authorities highlight class, spatial and temporal concerns. Local authority workers (in differing job roles) in their study identified feeling less confident to be out in working class areas, with senior managers and workers of an older generation who might hold stigmatising views. Older, male, heterosexual staff (in the participants' organisations) were referred to as being homophobic by a significant number of participants. This is unsurprising given the swift trajectory of legislation and changing social and cultural contexts.

Interestingly however, Humphrey (1999) suggests that different levels of victimisation can be associated with lesbians and gay men at work. She

found that lesbian narratives tended to express subtle forms of victimisation whilst gay male narratives revealed blatant forms of victimisation. This parallels with lesbians' experiences of abuse given that emotional abuse is the primary form of abuse. Not only do understandings of violence and abuse based on physical violence, obfuscate women's experiences of abuse but women are more likely to perpetrate emotional violence than physical forms of abuse (Donovan and Hester, 2014). This raises particular challenges for victim/survivors in same sex relationships in understanding their own experiences and speaking about them. The issue of not being out will often deter those experiencing abuse from speaking out about it to anyone (Irwin, 2006; 2008; Walters, 2011; St Pierre and Senn, 2010; McDonald, 2012; Donovan and Hester, 2014). In this way sexuality is used as a tool of control.

It is clear within the literature that not feeling able to be open about one's sexuality has meant some victim/survivors have remained in abusive relationships longer than they might otherwise have done (Irwin 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2008; 2010; 2014) and whilst young people reported a fear of being 'outed' (Donovan and Hester, 2008; 2014), conversely, not being out meant that victim/survivors often had no-one to confide in (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2011a). Some victim/survivors reported feeling shame about their sexuality (Irwin, 2008; McDonald, 2012) and about the abuse in their relationships (Giorgio, 2002;

Barnes, 2008; Irwin, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2014), particularly sexual violence (Barnes, 2008).

St Pierre and Senn (2010) found that being 'out' was the only significant factor in determining help-seeking behaviour in relation to formal support agencies, but this situation was not mirrored in Hardesty *et al.*'s (2008) study. The issue of parenting children appears to impact on decision-making. The mothers in this study were mainly out and did not fear exposure regarding their sexuality, nor did they report that their abusers attempted to control them using sexuality. However, half of them feared that their children may be removed because of the DVA in their relationships 'compounded by their sexuality' (Hardesty *et al.,* 2008, p.206). This demonstrates the need that the mothers felt to live up to a particular standard and that failure to do so would mean that their sexuality may be weaponised against them.

These factors, taken together, mean that a woman must be able to see beyond a number of counter-balancing discourses implicated in order to recognise her position:

- In order to recognise DVA in a same sex relationship a woman must be able to see beyond the discourse of DVA as a heterosexual, gendered and physical phenomenon. Further, she must be able to see beyond the similarly gendered discourse of love that set expectations

of unconditional love and support. She must equally be able to see beyond the construction of victimhood.

- As part of the decision to seek help, she will need to consider the risk of exposure of her sexuality in every (interwoven) area of her life, from the informal to the formal; friends, community, family, work, police, support agencies, social services and potentially the courts. All of these areas of her life are in turn mediated by other variables including her gender, age (and generation), class, ethnicity, (dis)ability, geographical location and status as a parent/ mother.

The additional issues presented by not being out in one, some or all parts of your life, or not being able to 'pass', adds a further level of complexity and itself gives rise to opportunities for abuse in the form of identity abuse.

2.4(1-3) Seeking help and support

Preceding an act of seeking help and support is a decision to seek help (Liang *et al.*, 2005). This decision can be mediated by the factors already discussed, but there are other factors that can impact on decision making. These factors can include perceptions and/or stories from within the gay community. Victim/survivors often retreat into silence, even having asked for support (Donovan and Hester, 2011a). Many victim/survivors experienced the fear of, and/or reality of, being disbelieved (Irwin, 2006; Donovan and Hester, 2011a), some within their own friendship groups (Irwin, 2006; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Victim/survivors found themselves disbelieved by support agencies too: counsellors, medical staff and the police (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2006; Donovan and Hester, 2014). Victim/survivors also feared the minimisation and trivialisation of the abuse (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2006; St Pierre and Senn 2010; Donovan and Hester, 2011a) with the research of Brown and Groscup (2009) revealing that this is not without due cause. Brown and Groscup (2009) found that workers rated more highly the seriousness of heterosexual cases of DVA. Similar patterns of issues in help-seeking were also identified in Turell's (1999) survey.

Cited worries about the police specifically included: fear of disbelief, minimising the abuse, perceptions of historical trivialisation and regarding DVA as a private matter (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2006; Donovan and Hester, 2011a; 2014). Donovan and Hester (2011a, p.39) reported that two of their participants had felt 'laughed at' by the police, resulting in feeling humiliated. Despite legislative changes, recent research indicates (from data on out of court settlements) that SSDVA is taken less seriously by police and the CPS than DVA that fits the public story of DVA (Westmarland, Johnson and McGlynn, 2018). Such statistics and fiercely held perceptions do little to erode the gap of trust between the police and the gay community (Donovan and Rowlands, 2011; Donovan and Hester, 2011a; 2014).

Furthermore, it is suggested that it is not always clear, in same sex women's relationships, who the perpetrator is and who the victim is, especially if the

victim had fought back (Irwin, 2006 and 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2011a) or the perpetrator herself had approached the agency for support (Giorgio, 2002). Barnes (2008) found that this issue is complex for the victim/survivor too, with one participant disliking the dichotomy in the language of victim/perpetrator. The fact that some victim/survivors defend themselves physically has meant that abuse is seen as mutual. This has had the impact of minimising the seriousness of the abuse (Irwin, 2008; Walters, 2011; Donovan and Hester, 2014). Gender stereotyping has led the police to falsely identify women as perpetrators; one victim/survivor they viewed as being more masculine and therefore the perpetrator (Irwin, 2006). Women who are identified as butch based on tropes of masculinity experience prejudice, even from within the gay community (Mackay, 2019). In heterosexual couples, a gender marker has been relied upon to determine victim and perpetrator.

In the UK context, there has been a practice of double-arrest where it is not clear who the victim is; this too has maintained a gap of trust between police and the community (Donovan and Rowlands, 2011). It is reported that where a decision could not be reached as to whom the victim was, the abuse has been simply regarded as women fighting (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2006; Walters, 2011). The same has been reported of support agencies (Donovan and Hester, 2014). One participant in Helfrich and Simpson's (2009) research suggests the need for a tool for agencies' use to determine victim and perpetrator to combat this. Arguably the development of the

CAADA-DASH RIC should fill such a gap (Robinson and Rowlands, 2009). However, this tool has been critiqued for being heterocentric and problematic when used by practitioners without sufficient skills or awareness regarding LGBT issues (Donovan and Rowlands, 2011). This is despite early recognition of the prevalence of different risk factors for LGBT people (Robinson and Rowlands, 2009).

A pivotal aspect in a decision to seek help is the probability of a positive outcome (Irwin, 2006; 2008; McDonald, 2012). It is perhaps unsurprising then that when victim/survivors sought support, they were most likely to turn to friends only or first (Irwin, 2006; 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2011a). Donovan and Hester (2011a) found victim/survivors turned to their friends over a counsellor, but far fewer still would seek help from the police. Like the mothers in Hardesty *et al.*'s (2008) study, the combination of vectors of oppression exacerbated concerns. Victim/survivors feared a negative response to a disclosure of DVA where they perceived a negative attitude to their sexual orientation from friends and families (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2006; 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2011a; McDonald, 2012) or from mainstream services (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2006; St Pierre and Senn, 2010; Donovan and Hester, 2011a).

Whilst a sympathetic response to a disclosure of abuse is better than a refutation, it is not always helpful. Often friends and family are not equipped to deal with the issues (Irwin, 2006; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Donovan and Hester (2014, p.180-183) call this a 'willing but unhelpful audience', however, 'willing and helpful' audiences were also identified. Irwin (2006) reports that friends and family lacked understanding of the accumulative impacts of the abuse, as evidenced by Donovan and Hester's (2014) comment that friends often simply told the victim/survivor to leave.

In the case of 'willing and helpful audiences' a 'momentum' was built that supported the victim/survivor in leaving (Donovan and Hester, 2014, p.183). Irwin (2006) reported that in some cases friends would not name the abuse as abuse, but tried to refute or explain it, but yet in other cases, friends rescued the victim from the circumstances, sometimes through extreme measures such as abduction. Whilst some supportive friendships helped people to realise that the relationship needed to end, for others it resulted in worry that they would lose friendships. This was because of disapproval of the relationship or because their abusive partner would find ways to bring about an end to the friendships (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Community knowledge (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001) and personal experiences of homophobic responses from formal service providers deterred help-seeking (Irwin, 2006; Walters, 2011; Donovan and Hester, 2014). In addition, many victim/survivors feared that by speaking out about DVA they would bring the gay community into disrepute and potentially open themselves up to criticism from the community on that

basis (Irwin, 2006; Walters, 2011; McDonald, 2012; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

It is clear that the contexts in which gay women are living become determining factors in how they manage being in, or exiting, an abusive relationship. Whilst people's individual personal biographies are different, there are also commonalities in experiences based on axes or vectors of prejudice that operate differently at differing levels of structure. However, those contexts also shape the abuse perpetrated against them. It is useful to consider what models are available for understanding DVA.

2.4(2) Models for understanding

Donovan and Hester's (2014) research compared heterosexual and same sex DVA asking questions about the nature of DVA in same sex relationships. It also questioned what impact discourses of love may have. The mixed methods study involved 746 individuals who were or had been in a same sex relationship. Donovan and Hester (2014) built on their findings through the adaption of the *Duluth Model* that was developed in the US for use with heterosexual female survivors and male perpetrators (Pence and Shepard, 1999) as previously discussed (in section 2.2(4)). The adapted model was entitled the *COHSAR Power and Control Model* (*Model 1* - see p.53) with indicative behaviours (Appendix 1) created by Donovan and Hester (2014). COHSAR is a name for their approach taken from 'Comparing Heterosexual and Same sex Abuse in Relationships' (Donovan

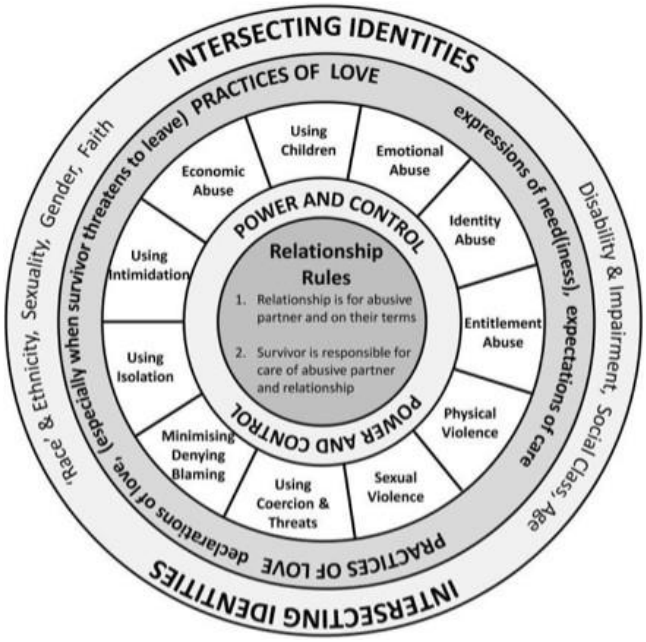
and Hester, 2014, p.35). Donovan and Hester's (2014, p.37) approach was feminist, drawing from standpoint and postmodern perspectives, regarding knowledge as situated whilst also affording consideration to the 'intersection of inequalities and difference'.

Whilst my research does not discount discourses of love and regards them as heteronormative and shaping (Irwin, 2006; Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2011a; 2014) it does not seek to explore this issue in depth. This research provides an alternative articulation of the issues (Collins, 2019). Donovan and Hester's (2014) model includes 'practices of love'. Such practices involve the abusive partner being positioned as being in need, for example, because of a history of abuse themselves or ill health. The victim/survivor is made responsible for the care of the abusive partner and also the relationship. Such practices of love may leave victim/survivors feeling that remaining in the abusive relationship is about love, loyalty and protecting their partner rather than recognising abuse. Donovan and Hester (2014) suggest that abuse is obscured from heterosexual women due to such practices being part of culturally accepted practices of masculine heterosexuality. Rather than exploring these practices focus is given to the exploring the socio-cultural perspectives that maintain them and how these perspectives are played out in the social and cultural lives of the participants in same sex relationships with women.

The most significant changes to the wheel from the original *Duluth Model* are the inclusion of the spokes of 'Identity Abuse' and 'Entitlement Abuse' to replace 'Male Privilege'. Whilst, in the centre of the wheel there is an inclusion of 'Relationship Rules' and an outer concentric circle introduces the notion of 'intersecting identities'. Relationship rules are about the abusive partner being in charge of the relationship and having their needs and desires met by it. There is a cost to disobedience or failure to meet the abusive partner's objectives (Donovan and Hester, 2014). The outer concentric circle Donovan and Hester (2014, p.210) use to represent 'the structural factors that provide the social and cultural context for the relationship'.

Model 1: COHSAR Power and Control Wheel

(Source: Donovan and Hester, 2014, p.205 – indicative behaviours associated with the Model are presented in Appendix 1)



The new spoke of identity abuse is defined by Donovan and Hester (2014, pp.204-205) as:

> The ways that sexist, misogynistic, heterosexist, homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, racist, classist, ableist and anti-faith insults, slurs, stereotyping' and assumptions might be used to undermine, threaten, isolate or punish a partner.

Whilst entitlement abuse is:

> The ways in which gender, chronological age, age through experience, race and ethnicity, (dis)ability, social class, education and immigration status can be used to impose power and control and thus enact relationship rules.

Both identity abuse and entitlement abuse are reliant on the existence of powerful normalising discourses to operate. Entitlement abuse indeed logically relies upon the marginalisation of particular identities. The *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* provided a framework that assisted in furthering my analysis. Two key aspects from the wheel have been developed in this work: identity abuse and intersecting identities. These aspects are explored and discussed in and through the historical and socio-cultural contexts of the participants together with their approach to assimilation.

My exploration of identity abuse was further aided by a theoretical conception by Guadalupe-Diaz and Anthony (2017) on transgender IPV (interpersonal violence) and identity abuse albeit that their approach was from a psychological perspective. Little research has been undertaken on

identity abuse that engages beyond the exposure of status as LGBT as tool of control and form of identity abuse. Guadalupe-Diaz and Anthony (2017) draw upon Goffman's (1963) theoretical conception of *discredited* and *discreditable* identities. Goffman (1963) articulated that experiences of stigma are different based upon how possible it was to conceal the site of stigma. A person of a different ethnicity has a stigma that is visible (ergo, *discredited*), whereas belonging to a sexual minority group may not be visible (ergo, *discreditable*).

People of discreditable identities may have to do more cognitive work to sustain social interactions and networks (Kanuha, 1999; Quinn, 2006). Furthermore, there may be less homogeneity between individuals who may, as a result, experience a lesser sense of belonging. This, in turn, may become a barrier to group-based identities and associated coping strategies leading to an increased vulnerability to the pernicious impacts of stigmatisation (Chaudoir, Earnshaw and Andel, 2013).

Guadalupe-Diaz and Anthony (2017, pp.1-2) use the term 'discrediting identity work' but are concerned with the inward processes, that is, how the self is discredited internally as an act of abuse. They argue that there are two predominant abuse tactics involved in this:

(1) redefining the situation to focus on participant-defined insecurities, a form of altercasting

(2) targeting sign-vehicles, including regulating gender transition treatments and controlling through props.

Sign-vehicles are anything that signifies the desired identity of the victim/survivor. This could be a material item (such as a wedding ring) or the public presentation of the relationship itself, for example, as a monogamous entity.

This research is underpinned by an amalgamation of the concepts presented through these models. Donovan and Hester's (2014) spokes of identity abuse, entitlement abuse, relationship rules and intersecting identities are brought together with Guadalupe-Diaz and Anthony's (2017) identity abuse tactics and the sociocultural locations of the participants to present an alternative articulation of the impact of heteronormativity in same sex relationships between women that are characterised by DVA. The next section will look at research approaches used in research to date in this field and the conceptual framework underpinning this research.

2.5 Research approaches and conceptual framework

This section highlights the trajectory of research approaches in the field of same sex DVA. There are further discussions of research approaches with specific regard to intersectionality within the methodology chapter (see section 3.3).

Early approaches to the study of DVA in same sex relationships were often focused on explaining the presence of DVA in lesbian relationships (using

psychological theories) or attempting to quantify the prevalence of it (Barnes and Donovan, 2018) although early accounts from the standpoint of lesbians do exist (for example, Lobel, 1986). Quantitative research produces an incomplete understanding of the use and effect of violence in intimate relationships (Donovan and Barnes, 2019). The turn to qualitative research has been followed by a turn toward research undertaken from an intersectional approach (Richardson and Monro, 2012). However, whilst intersectional research is rapidly increasing, with strong foci on vectors of race, gender and class, research that includes the intersection of sexuality has been less prevalent (Richardson and Monro, 2012; Barnes and Donovan, 2018).

For Barnes and Donovan (2018), sociological research, despite accounting for only a small proportion of research on SSDVA, has provided deeper exploration and led to the emergence of concepts such as the 'public story' of DVA. They articulate that whilst intersectional research is 'emerging, vast gaps remain in researching the intersections between LGBT DVA including ethnicity, disability, social class and faith' (Barnes and Donovan, 2018, p.71). Intersectional approaches to SSDVA have been utilised by Kanuha (2013), Donovan and Hester (2014), Donovan, Barnes and Nixon (2014), whilst an early exemplar of layers of intersectional analysis is provided in Hardesty *et al.*, (2008). The approach is promoted as desirable in future research (Barnes and Donovan, 2016; 2018; 2019).

The concept of intersectionality arose from the work of Crenshaw (1989). For Crenshaw the experiences of sexism and racism could not be separated from each other and further compound each other. They cannot be isolated, analysed and then addressed separately (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). Intersectionality holds as its central tenet that different dimensions of cultural and social life (axes or vectors of oppression, which include normalising social structures) are intersecting, mutually shaping and inextricable from one another (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Criticism of intersectionality as an approach mainly revolve around its 'ambiguity and open-endedness' (Garry, 2011), however these are described as its strengths also (Davis, 2008, p.67). Others have warned that its ambiguity gives rise to the potential for appropriation. Such appropriation (through neoliberalism) results in a loss of critical potential (Salem, 2016).

The issue of individuality versus homogeneity and categories is an issue for intersectionality also. There are debates about using category-based analysis (McCall, 2005; Walby, 2007). By focusing only on the intersections, analyses can become very individualistic; individual biographies mean that each person is unique. However, casting groups as categories is homogenising. Monro (2010) argues that category-based analysis and interstice (intersection oriented) is a way forward that retains individual difference and the ability to work with categories. This might also be regarded as the simultaneous use of intra-and inter-categorical approaches (McCall, 2005). This approach recognises the importance of

collectivity for social justice. It involves taking a 'strategic essentialist position'. "Strategic essentialism' means the adoption of certain identities as if they were real for the purposes of social interaction, identity politics and so on' (Richardson and Monro, 2012, p.3).

This position enables the critical potential of intersectionality to expose how social and cultural differences (such as gender, class and sexuality) and associated inequalities 'are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society' (Collins, 2000a, p.42), or put more colloquially; intersectionality has the ability 'to speak truth to power' (Mackay, 2013). Examining the social location of 'lesbian' without consideration of other vectors of discrimination would result in simplification and homogenisation (Richardson and Monro, 2012). There is further contestation over whether intersectionality should be defined as a methodology or whether it is limited to an analytical framework (and this is discussed in depth in sections 3.3 and 3.4 with specific reference to the methodology used in the *COHSAR* project). Collins (2019) has significantly advanced intersectionality as a social theory and this is also discussed further in section 3.3.

Previous methodological approaches on SSDVA have included autoethnography (Giorgio, 2002) together with more traditional sociological approaches, from grounded studies to mixed methods approaches. Whilst autoethnography is often conceived of as deeply personal, reflective

writing, it can vary in its approach from 'including personal experience within an otherwise traditional social scientific analysis … to the presentation of aesthetic projects' (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis, 2013, p.22). Giorgio's (2002) autoethnographical approach combined the use of others accounts with her own. Analytic autoethnography often utilises analytical-interpretive writing, which is a vehicle for socio-cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2013).

Whilst autoethnography is usually written in the first person, it can also be written in the third person. This might be for ethical reasons (Wyatt, 2006); and/or in use with memory work (Haug *et al.,* 1987); or for story telling purposes as in the case of Ellis (2004). Ellis (2004) used this approach to give an account of working within a domestic violence shelter. Thus, it is an appropriate approach for a sociological study of DVA and can be readily aligned with intersectionality (Collins and Bilge, 2016; Nichols and Stahl, 2019). It is the approach that I have taken in this research project (which is discussed further in Chapter 3).

2.6 Implications of the review

Many of the implications of the review have been highlighted throughout but an interpretation of the cumulative picture is provided here. The historical, legislative and social context in which gay women live is complex and has evolved significantly over the past 50 years. This impacts on different generations of gay women differently. Older gay women carry the

legacy of previous generations through their upbringing, generational location, geographical location and social location. Additionally, there have been changing discourses around sexuality and gender that are complex and interwoven. The research reveals that legislative protections are often at odds with the lived experience of these women (of whom I am one). The politics of the gay movement has mutated also. Arguably mainstream gay culture has been appropriated by neoliberalism as Duggan (2002) warned.

Whilst remonstrations of 'sameness' (with heterosexuals) produced legislative rights, this 'sameness' produced a need to cede to the duties of neoliberal and heteronormative frameworks. They necessitate compliance, or the perception of the need for compliance with (heteropatriarchal) gender and sexuality norms. This creates many and varied complex problems for women in same sex relationships that are characterised by DVA, despite increased legislative protection. Bringing together the research has demonstrated that gay women are negotiating challenging environments whilst fearing 'discrediting' (Goffman, 1963). The additional context of an abusive relationship adds further complexities and challenges. Dealing with SSDVA is already challenging for women for a number of reasons chiefly relating to heteronormativity, that were set out under themes of recognising abuse, silence and seeking help and support.

Donovan and Hester's (2014) seminal study identifies assimilation and the concept of 'sameness'. These themes are present in recent research about

SSDVA (Barnes, 2013a; 2013b; Donovan, Barnes and Nixon, 2014) and research not directly pertaining to SSDVA, but to LGBTQ experience. It is striking that the majority of respondents thought that the experience of DVA was the same for people in same sex relationships as heterosexual relationships in Donovan and Hester (2014). Where differences were believed to exist was in the response to abuse from outside of the relationship. This reinforces, normalises and further perpetuates the heteronormative public story of DVA. Furthermore, self-reliance is identified as being promulgated by neoliberalism and deepening the non-recognition of abuse. It further individualises and privatises the experience of, and responsibility for, abuse. Arguably, both of these concepts move forward the arguments in the field and open the door to specific research in these areas.

Barnes (2013b) queries whether same sex marriage would lead to increased entitlement and expectations analogous with heterosexual marriage. The introduction of the concepts of identity and entitlement abuse into the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* together provides opportunities for exploration, particularly of how identity abuse (through entitlement) is used in a legislatively different era. There is a need for investigation about the impact of civil partnerships and same sex marriage (including for those that are not married) on the lived experience of surviving, leaving and help-seeking in same sex women's relationships characterised by DVA. Guadalupe-Diaz and Anthony (2017) raise the

spectres of altercasting and targetting sign-vehicles (from a psychological perspective) in transgender victims of identity abuse but viewing this through an intersectional lens may prove fruitful to explore the avenues that facilitate identity abuse where the research on identity abuse is limited to the (fear of) exposure of sexuality.

2.7 Extending knowledge

There is little literature that contributes to exploring these issues, extending understanding and theorising on the differences in experience between heterosexual women's and lesbian's experiences of DVA from an insider-outsider position. The study further provides an original practitioner resource for use in conjunction with the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel*. It contributes to methodological innovation through the use of this model in theoretically sensitising the coding process and through the role of the researcher as full participant bringing an 'embodied relational understanding' (Todres, 2008, p.1566) (as discussed in Chapter 3) to the exploration of identity abuse in women's same sex relationships that are characterised by DVA.

2.8 Summary

Much of the research on SSDVA is complementary and there is very little disparity in findings. New themes are emerging of assimilation and sameness which is linked through broader and some topical literature to neoliberalism. Intersectional approaches are endorsed as an appropriate

framework for research in this area with most new research taking this approach. Bringing the research from different disciplines together has been fruitful in identifying an under-researched area: this being the impact of heteronormativity and assimilation on same sex women's relationships characterised by DVA, through an intersectional approach, utilising autoethnography in the era of formal same sex unions.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss my approach to exploring emic perspectives on the impact of heteronormativity and assimilation on Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) in same sex women's relationships. It espouses my position within my selected paradigm and proceeds into examining my research design, methods tools, analysis and presentation. The chapter will detail and demonstrate alignment between the paradigm, methodology and methods. My research would be considered to be within the paradigm of critical inquiry. It is qualitative, inductive, narrative and sociologically interpretive, intersectional and autoethnography within its methodological approach. It utilises intersectionality drawing on Collins' school of thought. This school of thought resists the additive approach to intersectionality (Baca Zinn, 2012) favouring 'relationality through addition' (Collins, 2019, p.16) (which is discussed in sections 3.2 and 3.3). It draws on standpoint theory as articulated by Harding (2004).

Together these complementary positions form the underpinning conceptual theoretical framework. Reflexivity and adaptable approaches are necessitated in qualitative research given that people are 'messy, idiosyncratic, complex and continually changing' (Baum, 2008, p.180). Moreover, it is not only people that are 'messy', but 'research, like life - is a contradictory, messy affair' (Plummer, 2011, p.195). This chapter seeks to highlight the decisions made, and morphing strategies applied, that better matched the constraints and requirements of the study (Ellis, 2004).

3.2 Ontological and epistemological positioning

The research draws on the relativist ontological position as portrayed by Crenshaw (1991). Levers (2013, p.2) defines a relativist ontological position neatly when she states 'reality *is* human experience and human experience *is* reality'. This position has antecedents in Marxism and the Frankfurt School, extending into Bourdieuan perspectives, standpoint theory and intersectionality (Collins, 2019). My analysis utilises intersectional methodological approaches (drawn from DeVault, 1999), which will be discussed in section 3.5(3). The data presentation deploys ethnographic practices mediated by feminist approaches drawing too on DeVault (1999) as discussed in section 3.5(4).

Crenshaw (1991), in her essay on violence against women, articulated intersectionality on three levels: representational, political and structural. In delineating this position, Crenshaw (1991) draws attention to both reality and knowledge being constructed, however, they are also constructed socially and through social relations of power. The relativist ontological position in this research involves the adoption of a strategic lesbian identity as real (Richardson and Monro, 2012) and the 'construct of community as a way of understanding collective identity' (Collins, 2019, p.14). It is from this ontological position that this research proceeds.

My epistemological positioning utilises (Harding's, extending into Collins',) standpoint theory (as complementary, having its antecedents in critical

theory). The purpose of my research was to examine emic perspectives (including my own) to elucidate the impact of heteronormativity on the experiences of DVA and help-seeking in same sex relationships between women. Since this involves an examination of both structural and individual experience, the given relativist ontological position and epistemological approach of standpoint theory, wherein research begins with the women researched was deemed most appropriate (Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987; Harding, 1991).

Teddlie and Tashakkori's (2009, p.84) much cited definition of a paradigm is as 'a worldview, together with the various philosophical assumptions associated with that point of view'. Whilst paradigms operate as theoretical frameworks that guide researchers toward appropriate methods, the development and debates around qualitative research has given rise to many paradigmatic possibilities (Punch, 2014). One such possibility was the emergence of the transformative paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 2000 [then named as the participatory paradigm]) and alternatively known as critical inquiry (Al Riyami, 2015). However, Inglis and Thorpe (2012, p.5) provide a precautionary warning that 'paradigms are not self enclosed and isolated from each other. Instead, they should be seen as loose assemblages of ideas that often have a lot more in common with other paradigms than it may at first seem'.

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.112-116) assert it is 'crucial' that before commencing research, the researcher knows what paradigm is characterising their approach since it determines how the research will be practically conducted and the interpretations stemming from this. Understanding the nuances arising from paradigmatic difference has been important for me; specifically, in relation to ontology and axiology. The impact of other approaches to this subject area (that is, psychological approaches) have tended to result, implicitly or otherwise, in apportioning responsibility for the DVA and or the failure to remove oneself from DVA, to lesser or greater extents, with the victim/survivor (Donovan and Hester, 2014). My background in critical theory and social care together with my experiences as a victim/survivor has led me to contest this position.

I have adopted the term of 'critical inquiry' as it has been applied by Collins and Bilge (2016) to the paradigm in which intersectional research resides. Intersectionality as critical inquiry paramountly requires the synergy of intersectional research and social justice orientated praxis (Collins, 2012; Collins and Bilge, 2016; Collins, 2019). It is important to me that my research contributes in a meaningful way to the development of practice, in line with Professional Doctorate studies, my personal values and my professional values and ethics as a social care education professional. Utilising intersectionality as methodology within the paradigm of critical inquiry is complex (if possible), as expedited by Collins and Bilge (2016), since not all critical inquiry is methodologically intersectional and some

forms of inquiry that might be considered intersectional, might more accurately be considered as typifying a different methodology, for example, Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Methodology has been defined by Harding (1987, p.3) as 'a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed'. As such, and deriving from one's ontological positioning, it connotes epistemological assumptions and requires aligned research design, methods and extends into data collection, data analysis and representation. One issue with this approach is the privileging of epistemology, if research develops from that which is known from the 'subjects' of the study then some 'knowers' are granted epistemic privilege over others (DeVault, 1999), that is, the researched themselves.

Smith (1992) however, postulates that it is not the individual themselves who are the point of investigation, but the material circumstances of their lived experience. From this perspective, there is no separation between 'what is known' and 'who it is known by', and traditional understandings of research are disrupted (DeVault, 1999). One way to partially resolve the criticisms of epistemic privilege is by making the researcher 'resource' rather than 'contaminant' (Krieger, 1991). Both approaches are taken in this research as the researcher is one of three participants. Collins (1990) proposes (from the viewpoint of intersectionality) that individual and

community knowledge could be conceived of as 'subjugated knowledges': it is drawn from, and developed through, intersectional approaches.

3.3 Intersectionality as methodology?

There is contestation over whether intersectionality should be defined as a methodology. Collins and Bilge (2016) postulate that intersectionality may be potentially viewed as methodology. Others view it differently; literature frequently refers to it as a perspective or analytical tool, for example, Cramer and Plummer (2009) and by Collins herself, who previously described it as an 'interpretative framework' (Collins, 2000a, p.46). Garry (2011) vehemently denies the possibility of it as a methodology and argues intersectionality is a framework or tool. Garry (2011, p.500) contends that it provides 'neither a theory of identity formation nor a theory of agency'.

However, Collins and Bilge (2016, p.206) partially attend to this concern stating that intersectionality draws on Bourdieu's (1977) notion of fields of power. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, in that it reflects Collins' concerns with articulating the trajectory of scholarship in perceiving of intersectionality as methodology. Secondly, it reinforces the ontological position of Collins' intersectionality as giving structure primacy over agency, as does Bourdieu (1977), albeit that those power relations are (potentially) fluid. It is not my intention here to get into 'paradigm wars', however, it is clear that methodologies are fluid and have potential to develop. Collins and Bilge (2016, p.208) indeed assert that the 'ambiguity and slippage

reflects a field in formation'. Collins (2019, p.6) articulates that intersectionality as a 'critical social theory … is under construction'. I would align myself with this view, suggesting that intersectionality is much more than interpretive framework but remains ambiguous with space for methodological innovation. For Collins (2019, p.5), intersectionality is 'a broad based, collaborative intellectual and political project with many kinds of social actors'.

One of the key issues in the debate about what intersectionality is, revolves around research design and the 'doing' of research as opposed to an analytical strategy. Intersectionality holds as a key defining feature the making explicit of social inequalities related to intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Bowleg, 2008; Collins and Bilge, 2016). However, intersectionality is not simply about adding together those inequalities; it is defined by (seeking to, and) examining the interplay between the 'intersecting, interdependent and mutually constitutive' identities in their social, historical and cultural location (Bowleg, 2008, p.314). 'Mutual shaping' has been suggested as an alternative term to 'mutual constitution' because each oppression can remain 'named' rather than suggesting it has become 'something totally different' through its interaction with the other (Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012, p.235). An additive approach is antithetical to intersectionality since it suggests that 'social inequality increases with each additional stigmatised identity' (Bowleg, 2008, p.314).

Bowleg (2008) cites various intersectional scholars in arguing that this leads to unhelpful positions. Firstly, she argues that the additive approach perceives of lived experiences as summative, individual and as such separated from others' experiences (citing Collins, 1995; Cuadraz and Uppal, 1999; Weber and Parra-Medina, 2003). Secondly, she argues, the additive approach supports the idea of a hierarchical approach to social inequality (citing Collins, 1995; Cuadraz and Uppal, 1999; Weber and Parra-Medina, 2003). Bowleg (2008) concludes that it is very difficult, if not impossible 'to do' methodological intersectional mixed methods research, since it is practically impossible to avoid any form of additive questions and analysis; even in so far as one must explore the individual identity positions in order to understand the overlaps.

Collins (2019, p. 6) therefore seeks to 'introduce and develop core concepts and guiding principles of what it will take to develop intersectionality as a critical social theory' which are 'provisional' and will involve 'developing agreed-upon understandings' (p. 15). Hitherto intersectionality may be better defined by what it is not, with Collins (2019, p.5) arguing that its 'heterogeneity is not a liability, but rather may be one of its greatest strengths'. Collins (2019) further articulates that intersexuality is dialogic and interpretive, and invites its use within a context of formation and discovery. The objective of intersectionality is understanding and changing the social world. Its core constructs are power, social inequality, social context, complexity, social justice and relationality (Collins, 2019, p.44).

Its practices involve social action and the analysis of social action, intellectual resistance, critical theorising, producing social knowledge in pursuit of the democratization of knowledge and knowledge creation. The key tool of intersectional analysis is 'relationality through addition, articulation and co-formation (Collins, 2019, p. 16).

3.3(1) Relationality

As stated previously, a debate within intersectionality focuses on additive approaches wherein the social inequality an individual faces is the sum of their stigmatised identities. Collins (2019, p.227) regards this type of additive approach as 'segregation' and states that this approach 'underlies Western knowledge'. Collins (2019) propounds that the logic of segregation is that there is a hierarchy of inequalities. Collins (2019, p. 228) argues that 'categorical logic … underpins Western epistemology' resulting in different disciplines and specialisms and distinct bodies of knowledge, for example, art and science. This ripples out into all areas of social life with Collins (2019, p.228) articulating that 'to distribute social goods, one needs to know who truly belongs to the category at hand and who is the interloper' and the goes on to link this to citizenship: 'Citizenship debates are very much about this issue of belonging'.

In studying sexuality, for example, one might have a master category and then simply add another category to this (such as gender). By adding 'onto' rather than 'into' one may miss the intersectional spaces. Collins (2019,

p.228) warns ‘unequal power relations do not simply disappear within intersectional spaces, but rather can reorganize themselves within those spaces’. This is where relationality is important. Relationality entails a dialogic engagement whereby one starts with the intersection of sexuality and incorporates different intersections such as location and generation.

Collins (2019, p.120) warns that without a dialogic approach there is a risk that intersectionality may collapse into one overall ‘hollowed out’ discourse. Resistant knowledges and practices central to intersectionality and individual resistant knowledge projects must be in dialogue with one another but their ‘particularities’ and ‘genealogy’ must be observed. For example, feminism and queer theory should be used in dialogue with one another in so far as it is helpful, but they must not be collapsed into one another.

Relationality is developed in intersectional work through ‘articulation’ and ‘co-formation’ (which in turn is likely metaphorical) (Collins, 2019). Articulation as a concept has two parts. Firstly, Collins (2019) draws on Hall (2017) and the metaphor of an articulated lorry with moving parts to symbolise that society is moving parts that contribute to the whole. The key to this metaphor is dynamism; the parts are not static in relation to one another. Secondly, articulation is about the speaking and making sense of ideological relationships. Collins (2019, p. 233) states that ‘sets of ideas

can be coupled and uncoupled, yet both the new entity as well as the separate parts are changed by these transactions'.

Co-formation is a tool for building critical theory. Collins (2019) suggests that McCall (2005) and Walby (2007) show promise in directions for social science but argues that the humanities demonstrate different ways of theorising that may take co-formation in intersectionality forward. In co-formation there are 'no right or wrong arguments, no absolute truths, only better or worse arguments' (Collins, 2019, p.242-243). Intersectionality can then be conceptualized as 'a social theory that that guides the search for truth and as a social theory that guides the search for meaning' (Collins, 2019, p.243). A tool for doing this is metaphor and the metaphor of jazz is used as an exemplar due to its constant recreation and dynamism (Collins, 2019, p.247).

Collins language and ideas are philosophical and not easily translated into methodological approaches. Collins (2019, p.249) would argue that this is in part 'epistemic resistance'. For Collins, homogeneity and prescriptive methods close down knowledge projects and intersectionality remains unknowable and indescribable. Collins (2019, p. 252) observes 'perhaps the space of intersectionality is inherently a space of co-formation, awaiting a new language that better describes what happens there'. The research presented here is a search for truth and meaning and an alternative

articulation of a social problem. It is a 'provisional analyses that can be perpetually recast' (Collins, 2019, p.234).

3.4 Building tools for understanding

Hester and Donovan (2009) and Hester, Donovan and Fahmy (2010) recount the methodological difficulties in creating a survey tool that incorporates sophisticated understandings of power, gender and sexuality and are aligned with specific feminist epistemologies (that is, standpoint and intersectionality) used in the COHSAR survey. Creating such a methodological tool is neither pragmatically nor fiscally judicious within the confines of doctoral studies. Furthermore, the intended outcome of my study was different to Donovan *et al.* (2006). It develops some themes and arguments made from within it, building on it and other studies (as outlined in Chapter 2). Bowleg (2008), although unable to see a way forward for intersectionality as methodology, presaged a way forward. Collins and Bilge (2016) cite Bowleg's (2008) powerful position that intersectionality is ultimately not about what we do, but what we experience. This study utilises emic perspectives to examine those experiences. Collins and Bilge (2016) thus propose that the door is open for many forms of narrative work, including autoethnographies, which is the method adopted in this study.

3.4(1) Autoethnography as method?

The epistemological use of standpoint theory guided me towards an interpretive grounded inductive approach to my research, incorporating the use of my own experiences. Although Anderson's (2006) analytic autoethnography criteria (from the perspective of rigour) requires the use of dialogue with informants beyond the self, for me, adopting this position was about demonstrating commonalities in experience: moving beyond 'self' and individual narratives of lived experience. It was about beginning with a context, excavating categories of difference (*ex post)* and examining power relations pertaining to that context (Tahtli and Ozbilgin, 2012).

Categories of disadvantage and inequality are fluid, spatial and temporal, thereby, specific social categories, which might not necessarily be associated with inequality when viewed singularly, such as being of a specific generation and/or living in a semi-rural community, when embodied in a marginalised individual, generates further interdependent social constructions and inequality (Collins, 2000b; Caiola, McGee and Harmon, 2015; John, 2015). This study utilises this position in considering the historical, generational and physical loci of participants and how these factors contribute to their shaping of, their understanding of, and their experiences of, surviving SSDVA. This is similar to Crenshaw's (1991) analytical approach, but her analysis focused on a priori 'inter-categorical' socially constructed axes of disadvantage and inequality.

McCall (2005) would define this as the simultaneous use of intra- and inter-categorical approaches. Such an approach focuses on the intersections of a specific group (intra-categorical) and yet examines those very same intersections (inter-categorical). In other words, I take my identity and context, together with others, whose categories of (sameness through) difference emerged from the data. I use them to illuminate the historical, contextual, structural and socially constructed interplay of disadvantage and oppression that simultaneously impacts on, and results from, the lived experience of surviving SSDVA. An emic approach was selected over an etic approach as it helps minimise 'the additive approach' by beginning with the relations and processes and not the intersectional identity itself (Anderson, 1996). This, Tahtli and Ozbilgin (2012) argue, can overcome the essentialism of pre-determined categories of marginalisation. The emic perspective does not objectify the marginalised identity: it is it. As such, it offers a perspective that the detached outsider could not bring (Ellis, Kiesinger and Tillman-Healy, 1997). This study adopted an 'insider-outsider' position, the mechanics of which will be further discussed through the following sections.

Whilst complementary and cited as a way forward for intersectional research, autoethnography is no less controversial and intangible than intersectionality itself. There is no one method or one set of instruments that might prescriptively be named 'autoethnography' and indeed, it should be considered as more than simply a method, but as a vehicle for change

both for the individuals who engage in it and for others through potential social change (Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2013). The commitment to social justice aligns it with intersectionality. From a research orientated perspective, autoethnography is both contested from without: for lacking rigour (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Atkinson, 1997; Anderson, 2006) and for self-indulgency (Walford, 2004; Atkinson, 2006), and from within: as to what actually constitutes autoethnography and how 'socially scientific' it should be (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 2006; Charmaz, 2006a; Ellis and Bochner, 2006; Williams and Jauhari bin Zaini, 2014).

Ellingson and Ellis (2008) state that the three key elements of autoethnography are narrative writing, the focus on a personal story, and that the end product must be evocative. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011, p.273) characterise it additionally as an 'approach to research and writing'. It utilises personal experience to analyse and understand cultural experience. Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013) state this determined purpose, amongst other factors, separates autoethnography from other forms of autobiographical and personal narrative writing. Other key determinants of autoethnographical research include: the use of the personal to contribute to research in the topic area, purposefully embracing one's own subjectivity and building a relationship with the reader that induces a response. Thus, it seeks not only to illuminate and problematise cultural experiences, it also requires 'new and different actions in the world based on the insights generated by the research' (Holman Jones, Adams

and Ellis, 2013, p.36). It is, therefore, strongly associated with social justice (Adams and Holman Jones, 2008; Williams and Jauhari bin Zaini, 2014). The inclusion of self and social justice were the primary reasons that autoethnography was selected as a vehicle for this research.

There are various approaches to, and various forms of, autoethnography. Autoethnography is a triadic approach to research that 'describes and analyses (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand the cultural (ethno)' (Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011, p.273). Anderson (2006) proposed a form of autoethnography that he names as 'analytic autoethnography'. Ellis and Bochner (2006) and Ellingson and Ellis (2008) critique his account of this on the basis of being devoid of one element they argue is required by autoethnography, namely evocation. For Ellis and Bochner (2006), Anderson's proposed model removed that which is subversive about autoethnography. Ellis and Bochner (2006) postulate that such a move to define autoethnography in this way could lead to validity and generalisability criteria, akin to previously well-established social sciences criteria.

Anderson's (2006) analytic auto ethnography was chosen for this research for precisely the reason that sociology is at the heart of the study. There are opportunities (as discussed in 6.5(2)) for practical applications of the research which include the evocative use of stories. It is important for me to produce something socially scientific that may be of use to

victim/survivors, practitioners and students. Although I have utilised storytelling craft in the production of the findings (see section 3.5(4)), I wanted to immerse myself from an insider-outsider perspective in producing research with tangible and credible social science outcomes.

Autoethnography has the capacity to borrow from sympathetic methods and genres. One other sympathetic approach is that of grounded theory. A grounded theory style approach can be utilised in the analysis stages of autoethnography (Ellis, 2004; Pace, 2012). This approach clearly stems out of the symbolic interactionist perspective and history of autoethnography (Pace, 2012). Pace (2012) postulates that grounded theory strategies may be invaluable, when used in principle, rather than as an inflexible set of procedures by autoethnographers who take an analytic stance in their work. Chang (2008) and Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernadez (2013) suggest a constructivist systematic coding approach should be undertaken without a pre-determined set of codes and that data collection and analysis should be performed simultaneously in a dynamic process, with analysis feeding back into the data collection process. This layered approach has been utilised in this study, as discussed in the data collection section.

Whilst it may appear that there are many serious debates about autoethnography from within, such as the split between analytic and evocative forms of autoethnography, the point needs to be made that many of these could be seen in the context of evolving and emerging

methodologies. Ellis and Bochner (2006) sought also to highlight, for example, commonalities between Anderson's (2006) position and their own and argue that there is no reason why traditional analysis cannot be incorporated into autoethnography as they envisage it, but that it should not come to define it.

This position, crucially, has never been ruled out by, but has specifically been acknowledged by, Ellis and Bochner (2006), Ellingson and Ellis (2008), Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013) and Williams and Jauhari bin Zaini (2014). Many of the discussions of the past seem to have been contextualised. It is useful to re-iterate that Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013, p.22) characterise autoethnography as 'the use of personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience' and argue that that happens on a continuum from traditional social scientific forms through to the most radical and performative forms. It is this very wide definition of autoethnography that is embraced within this thesis. The fluidity of the method makes it a suitable vehicle for the sociological analysis of one's own experiences alongside others.

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) posit that the crisis brought about by postmodernism in the 1980s led to many opportunities to rework social science inquiry. They argue that out of this arose a desire on the part of academics to write in value-centred ways that embrace (rather than attempt to eradicate) bias, which was, by then, understood to be an

impossible task. Charmaz and Mitchell (1997) argue that autoethnography has challenged views about silent authorship where the researcher's views are not explicitly present in the research. It developed out of a desire to demonstrate how the personal is important in, and to, the understanding of cultural life (Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2013). This, viewed alongside the epistemological challenge presented by standpoint theory and taken up by intersectionality makes clear why autoethnography and intersectionality can be viewed as not simply compatible, but complementary. Autoethnography, like intersectionality, challenges the way in which research is done, but it also challenges its representational forms. It has potential to be far-reaching and equally accessible to non-academics, which Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013) posit, enables it to be better used for social justice ends.

3.4(2) My autoethnographical positioning and motivations

My research leans toward analytic autoethnography and more traditional ethnographic processes. I have centred the lived experiences of the participants' and they are, in and of themselves, evocative. This is not an uncritical commitment to realism, which, as discussed previously, was critiqued by Ellis and Bochner (2006), but instead, it is a commitment to relativism; to an intersectional understanding that people's experiences and lives shape, and are shaped by, the material circumstances of their lives in fluid reciprocity, but mostly in ways that are not of their own choosing. It is the 'relational' and the 'reciprocal' that are of primary

importance: this is the point of differentiation from critical realism (Flatschart, 2017).

I have engaged in this approach for five reasons. Firstly, this thesis has an intended purpose [given that my position in the 'field', from a Bourdieuan (1990) perspective, is not as a tenured distinguished professor] as an assessed thesis in the completion of doctoral studies. Secondly, the nature of autoethnography is a personal narrative and in my personal narratives I tend toward analysis therefore it would lack authenticity to deviate from this. Thirdly, I would not wish for the social justice tenet, that is strong within the work, to be disavowed on the basis that the work is simply considered 'self-indulgent'; I want it to be of some use to the marginalised voices (including my own) that it seeks to (re)present in challenging others to action. Fourthly, whilst I might agree with Bochner (in ICQM BGU, 2015) that storytelling can be theoretical, in and of itself, I would also want to make my own theoretical contribution to the area of DVA in same sex women's relationships and demonstrate knowledge of the past research on the topic in line with what Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013) articulate about contributing to knowledge.

Finally, but of equal importance, I recognise that producing evocative texts may increase accessibility to a more mainstream audience and this forms part of my commitment to engage with social justice issues and those effected by them (Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2013). I hope that my

presentation in Chapter 4 has this potential use (as discussed further in the section on 3.5(4)) but the focus of my study is the lived experience and not avant-garde art representations of it. I wanted the research to demonstrate verisimilitude (Ellis, 2004).

In summary, the above has outlined my ontological and epistemological positioning within the paradigm of critical inquiry. Methodological concerns of intersectionality and autoethnography have been discussed highlighting both complimentary, and the less complimentary, aspects. Both intersectionality and autoethnography have a strong focus on social justice and epistemologically privilege lived experience. Autoethnography, as method, when used in conjunction with complimentary theoretical frameworks, offers a reframing of tools for research and posits the 'self' as a necessary part of research. Intersectionality delineates an ontological position that may be taken by autoethnographers - but need not be. The following sections will focus on how the practical applications of my position.

3.5 Research design and process

As would be expected in a study that is inductive and reflexive, the work presented here is not the study that was initially proposed. Some of the direction of the study was, in fact, serendipitous (as discussed in section 3.4(1)). The following sections describe and account for the processes and decisions and justifications for those decisions. At the outset, the intention

of the study was to explore the research question with specific focus on help-seeking. There are some pragmatic reasons why this was the case; not least the presence of extant literature on the topic. It is important to be able to make comparison with other studies and situate one's own work within the academic conversation (DeVault, 1999). Autoethnography was decided on to embrace bias, rather than to pretend to be a distanced researcher on an issue that does not affect me as this would feel unethical. There is further discussion of 'insider' status in section 3.4(2). As discussed in Chapter Two, the research terrain in relation to DVA in same sex women's relationships has historically been more 'scientifically' grounded albeit that there is a small, but growing, body of research that is qualitative and sociological, and Donovan and Hester's (2014) large mixed methods seminal study that embraces intersectional and standpoint approaches.

This study intended to provide an in-depth emic account utilising an intersectional approach. In order that my story should not be perceived as an autoethnographic account that descends into self-indulgence, which is often a criticism of autoethnography (Sparkes, 2002), it utilises my own story alongside others. This was also an imperative, given the intersectional nature of the work in order to demonstrate that the experiences were not simply *my* experiences but that they - the overlaps, intersections and the consequences of those overlaps and intersections - could be found in the experiences of others. For these reasons, I moved towards analytic autoethnography as opposed to evocative styles. I did not want my

experiences to be dismissed. Furthermore, there is some consensus that the analytical approach improves validity and therefore strengthens trustworthiness (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 2006; Vryan, 2006; Chang, 2008 and 2013). A very similar approach was utilised by Giorgio (2002, p.1233) who, within her USA located study, includes only small portions of her own experiences as one amongst '11 abused lesbians and 10 domestic violence advocates'.

3.5(1) Sampling

Having achieved ethical approval for the study (discussed in section 3.6) I set out to recruit participants. Recruiting to studies that focus on hidden and marginalised populations always presents challenges (Weston, 2004). I had decided that I wanted my study to focus on women's experiences and I was seeking similarity to demonstrate that my own experience was not a 'one-off'. I was not trying to obtain a representative sample or purposefully seeking to incorporate pre-determined intersections: I was not necessarily seeking to avoid them either. As I did not have financial support and being aware of emerging digital communities (Siebler, 2016), I had proposed to recruit my sample online from one of the larger online social networking groups (with a membership in the thousands - although not all regular users). This strategy would be considered to be (online) convenience sampling (Morse, 2007). Online convenience sampling has been viewed as an enhancement of traditional convenience sampling due to wider reach (Leiner, 2016). To this end, I approached the administrators of the group

and gained permission to advertise. In ethnographic terms, this might be considered to be a 'virtual field', however, I used this only in the recruitment strategy and did not undertake ethnographic work in a virtual field (Wittel, 2000; Potter, 2017).

I was already a member of the group and reasonably well known by regular users, as I commented with frequency on threads. I was aware that the group had been the site of an ethnographic project before (for Master's level study). I knew that there were others in the group who had experienced DVA too, as there had been previous discussions of it on the group page. I had initially considered focusing the study on the use of online environments as a source of help and information, as this is an area ripe for study. I posted an advertisement in the group specifying clearly what the research project was focused on (see Appendix 2).

By doing this the post was clearly asking women to self-identify as victim/survivors of DVA, which, in itself can be seen as problematic, it is likely also that, given the results of this study and other studies (as discussed in Chapter 2), only women who had experienced physical violence would likely respond to this (Donovan and Hester, 2014). It would, undoubtedly, deter some women from responding. It also made clear that the researcher was a member of 'the community' and had experienced DVA also.

Whilst this study used the term 'domestic violence and abuse' in its recruitment, Donovan and Hester (2014) highlighted some very good reasons around non-recognition of abuse (as discussed in section 2.4(1-1) for not using that specific term, mainly being, that women who do not recognise any DVA in their relationships will not respond. Whilst appreciating such reasoning, it is unlikely that ethical approval would have been granted to this particular study without identifying the nature of it. Furthermore, the nature of this study is very different. Although asking participants to self-identify (and recognising the problematic nature of that) the culture of the online group in which the advertisement was placed is one of self-definition. To become part of the online group requires only self-identification as female and an interest in relationships with women.

The group does not exclude people on the basis of bi-sexuality, pansexuality or being transgender, nor does it exclude those who have not had a relationship with a woman. In this way, there was access to a representational population whose homogeneity is limited to being female (by self-definition) and having a sexual interest in other (self-defining) females. The focus of the group is the creation of a safe place for discussion and interaction, and whilst, of course, people do meet and form relationships through it, it is not a dating group.

There were 15 responses to the post. The majority of these were screened out immediately due to the geographical location of the respondent being

the USA or Australia. Retrospectively, I should have thought to specify that I wanted to focus on women within a UK context. Although it would be interesting to conduct the research on a global basis, it would have changed the study in unknown ways and did not fit with my social care professional goal, which is linked to UK policy and practice. Some respondents were screened out due to not meeting the advertised ethical requirements (see Appendix 2). These women were appropriately sign-posted on to appropriate support services as required: in all cases, they had left the relationship, but not been out of it for long enough or were not out of touch with the woman they stated was abusive to them.

In the end, there were three respondents left. All respondents were sent supporting materials and agreed to face-to-face interview via electronic means. One respondent subsequently dropped out prior to interview due to a change in health circumstances. As small-scale samples are common using autoethnographic analytic approaches (Chang, 2008), I continued with the identified participants rather than re-advertise.

Morse (2007) suggests that often researchers fail to move beyond a convenience strategy. The process outlined above (although with some serendipitous intervention) can be thought of as a '*critical juncture'* (Morse, 2007, p.237) wherein the sampling strategy moved from convenience sampling to purposeful sampling where the participants selected represent a typology. Whilst some might contend that this introduces bias, I would

suggest that qualitative research cannot escape bias (Morse, 2007). Morse (2007) also articulates that research is not a perfect process and mistakes are made and progressed from. This is common and, in fact, enhances the richness of the data processing and analysis. This is most certainly true of this study as it significantly altered the direction of the research (see section 3.5 (2)). Morse (2007) articulates that it is a mistake not to move from convenience strategies into purposeful sampling strategies. The approach outlined therefore fits with grounded theory style analysis strategies (see section 3.5(3)).

3.5(2) Data collection

Data collection was predominantly undertaken using interviews. Before interview, I gathered some initial data about the participants. I found that we were all separated in age by 8 years and all had been in civil partnerships and all had parents who had been married for many years. This turned out to be incredibly serendipitous. I might have, on reflection, had I thought to do so, designed the study this way. It was during analysis, however, that the significance of this surfaced by highlighting the intersection of generation. I decided to collect data primarily through interview. This was for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was pragmatic. It enabled me to have (initially) only one format of data to analyse. Secondly, it ensured equality of opportunity for the participants to have their voices heard. Thirdly, it gave rise to the decision to use a 'mediated' form of dyadic interviewing (see section 3.6(1) for information on mediation practices).

I wanted to allow the participants' voices to come through the study and for them to share their stories and perspectives. In other words, I was seeking to ameliorate and mitigate against what Adams (2008) calls 'narrative privilege'. Through the use of interviews, I attempted to become, at times, a 'detached outsider', although arguably as a member of the community and an insider to the study, I am subjective and this could not be fully achieved (Biscomb, 2012, p.256). Christoffersen (2018) indeed would argue that there is no fully insider position as, from a dialogic perspective, we all bring different 'selves' (including participants) to research; I, for example, bring practitioner, researcher/academic, gay woman, mother, et cetera. Philosophically, then, there can be no pure 'insider' or 'outsider' position. It is the space and tension between the roles that is simultaneously problematic and fruitful (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

The data collection subsequently included an artefact provided by a participant in the form of a text dialogue that was recorded in a journal. Its use is in keeping with autoethnographic methods (Chang, 2008). It has an intended use as a teaching tool as it illustrated many identifiable abusive tactics. It has the potential to offer students an 'insider' position (for a further discussion of this, see Chapter 6 Conclusion). This was the only artefact used in the study.

The first interview was conducted (in person) with a participant who was a supportive friend of mine. This interview was not used in the study as it did

not really fit; the friend is not a full member of the community. It did, however, as a pilot study, sensitise me to some concepts (for example, the use of the term 'arguments'). Interviews were sequentially conducted with the participants with my interview taking place last. Interviews were conducted face-to-face using video telephone technology and recorded in audio form. This introduced additional considerations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) around confidentiality, which were ameliorated by the relationships built through full member researcher-participant status. Furthermore, this suited participants who are used to online communications and was convenient for all parties. It created a relaxed atmosphere for the participants. Participants were offered the opportunity to member check transcripts (Green *et al.*, 2007) and add or remove comments in line with an approach that involved overt and reflexive consideration of the participants and the use of their voices and stories (DeVault, 1999).

The two participants took part in reflexive dyadic interviews. This is a form of interactive interview (Morgan *et al.*, 2013) in which the 'interview' is more of a conversation. The shared understanding of 'community', of history, of oppression, of lesbian camaraderie (Siebler, 2016) and experiences of DVA enabled an 'embodied relational understanding' (Todres, 2008) which lead to more fruitful data collection. Conducting an interview of this type required the use of my previously gained social care skills. I ensured, in interviews, that the focus was centred on the

participant's story, whilst retaining the embodied relational understanding. The embodied relational understanding is clearly visible in the humour evident in the transcripts.

Using interviews requires the use of memory; it draws on the memories of the participants. The presentation of memories is therefore understood within this study as the presentation of stories. If the definition of identity is the assimilation and integration of many and possible available cultural and social narratives into a purposeful life history (Davis, 1996), the presentation of those stories is essential to the (dis)assemblage of identity. Memories, given as a story, in interview, can therefore be thought of in this light. They are not full and factual. Indeed, they could never be, from a dialogic perspective. They are stories of the participants' histories (Stephenson, Kippax and Crawford, 1996).

My own interview drew on the concept of 'memory work' (Haug *et al.,* 1987) in which one adopts a third person status to objectify the experience before working with the objectified memory through analysis. This method is one of a range of methods used in autoethnography (Douglas and Carless, 2013). Using Haug *et al.*'s (1987) method always requires other parties to assist (Onyx and Small, 2001) and assistance was provided by a member of University staff who is also a 'full member of the community' (and was offered the same support as an interviewee-participant as described in section 3.6). By adopting full researcher/ participant status, I thereby

subjected myself to the same 'scrutiny' as the subjects of the enquiry; this approach is endorsed by Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013). Chenail (2011) argues that such an approach gives the researcher insight into how it feels and therefore promotes highly ethical research, as well as sensitising the researcher to pertinent areas to explore. Furthermore, it enabled me to speak freely and led to unguarded comments that I could reflexively process in the analysis (Fonow and Cook, 1991; Naples, 2003; DeVault and Gross, 2007).

3.5(3) Data analysis

An interpretive grounded theory style approach was utilised in analysis as positively viewed by Anderson (2006), Atkinson (1997) and Chang (2008). It was not as prescriptive in its approach as grounded theory and was more in line with how Ellis (2004) views thematic analytic approaches. The first two interviews (one with a friend and one with a participant) were transcribed by *The Transcription Company* (thetranscription.co.uk) due to spinal injury. A minor ethics amendment was made to ensure confidentiality arrangements were satisfactory. I subsequently preferred (as soon as able) to transcribe myself as this enabled greater familiarisation with the transcript from the outset and began the analytic process. Data analysis was an iterative process. I came to the first interview already with preconceptions and sensitising knowledge but initial categories emerged from the data (Dey, 2007; Holton, 2007).

Each interview was coded thematically using a common-sense approach (Kelle, 2007). Categories, for example, 'abuse', 'family', 'friends', 'help' et cetera, emerged. The master category of 'sexuality' (from an intersectional perspective) was present from the outset. Maps were drawn indicating the relationship of ideas to other ideas and data. Once the second interview and third interviews had taken place, a process of comparison took place iteratively. I would suggest that my preconceptions led initially to not identifying some categories that emerged. Comparison between the transcripts assisted in bringing these areas to light. Through the use of maps, the categories, colour coding and revisiting the transcripts many times, the categories of data shaped into overarching themes and the transcripts went through a process of recoding according to the themes.

The themes that emerged were identity, belonging and abuse. Initially the abuse coding was very generic (using categories of physical, emotional and sexual). The theme of power and control emerged as an overarching theme. A decision was made to compare the already inductively coded data with indicative behaviours in the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* (Donovan and Hester, 2014) (see Table 1, pp.45-49) as the indictive behaviours (see Appendix 1) may illuminate aspects of abuse participants had shared. This theoretical sensitisation of the data may occur in constructivist grounded approaches (Charmaz, 2006b) and interpretive grounded approaches (Sebastian, 2019).

It led to thinking about the mechanics of the abusive practices and started to shift the direction of the study. As the abusive behaviours (particularly in the area of emotional abuse) were coded more discretely, it began to be apparent that there were particular abusive practices that always involved the use of others. This approach is most certainly not a pure grounded theory approach rather it is in the style of such approaches. Such an approach retains the primacy of the data and theoretical insights are not overlaid onto the data. In interpretive grounded approaches literature can be used for 'data comparisons, [to] enhance sensitivity, stimulate observations and confirm or explain results' (Sebastian, 2019, p. 4). This type of abductive analysis is useful in intersectional enquiry (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). The *COSHAR Power and Control Wheel* spokes and indicative behaviours were used as preconceived ideas in the vein of 'tentative tools rather than definitive concepts … they open[ed] up enquiry rather than shutting it down' (Charmaz, 2006b, p.31).

It became apparent that there were commonalities in the mode of usage of such practices relating to the role that person played in the life of the victim/survivor; the way families of origin were utilised was different to the way friends and friendships or intimacies were utilised. Furthermore, it became evident that these abusive practices needed to be supported by the social and cultural assumptions of the victim/survivor to hold those particular forms of power. The study, therefore, started to take shape around the identity of the participants (as they themselves perceived it),

their perspectives, and how their identities and associated perspectives were used against them. Aspects of their identity and their experiences were examined in the light of the wider socio-cultural, historical and legislative backdrop which contextualised their experiences in line with intersectionality (Collins and Bilge, 2016). In other words, relational thinking through articulation was used to:

> Posit contingent non-necessary connections … between ideology and social forces, between different elements within ideology, between different social groups within a social movement, and between different knowledge projects. (Collins, 2019, p.234)

3.5(4) Data presentation

Autoethnography is presented in many forms; its non-traditional presentation might be argued to be a defining feature by some (Holman, Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2013). Giving short consideration of this in the methodology is therefore pertinent. This study is presented for the most part in traditional thematic ethnographic form utilising 'thick description' (as attributed to Geertz, 1973, and as delineated by Denzin, 1989), but attention has been paid to storytelling craft (Ellis, 2004).

Chapter 4 presents three separate, but thematically organised stories, linking the commonality of experiences with individual lived experience. The claims made are linked to social life, but they are explicated through the evocative stories of the participants. There is deliberate use of a narrative tone more familiar in novels (with the occasional use of metaphor and simile) and where the voice of the participant is not 'cleaned up' or

polished (Richardson, 1992; DeVault, 1999). Therefore, participants' speech is verbatim, including the occasional use of profanity, in line with the standpoint and socio-cultural background of the participant (Richardson, 1992; DeVault, 1999). Italics are used as a writing technique. Their use is purposeful to highlight and emphasise 'the subjectivity present' in particular important scholastic findings (Colyar, 2013). Like typical ethnographic writing, however, there is variegation in the dialogue, the general and the specific (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

One extended narrative is presented and one short dialogue. These both have potential for use as teaching tools with groups of students in teaching on DVA, both broadly and specifically (see section 6.5(2)). Genders, for example, could be altered to powerfully raise awareness, in similar style to the research undertaken by Brown and Groscup (2009). The presentation of these is used as part of the storytelling craft in line with autoethnographical practices but also, particularly with the dialogue, to analytically demonstrate key concepts. The extended narrative which recounts a violent episode was provided by a participant as a monologue and was kept whole out of commitment to the participant's voice. Layering the account, I felt, may have taken from its power. I did not want to write in the tradition of 'silencing' (DeVault, 1999, p.177).

3.5(5) Creation of a heuristic device

A model is presented (see section 6.5(2)) which utilized the tool of co-formation in its creation. It offers a visualization of the experience of 'mutually constructing systems of oppression' (Collins, 2019, p.234) with movement towards the creation of theory. The stories of the victim/survivors (in Chapter 4) and the theoretical discussions (in Chapter 5) were foundational in the development of the model but it should not be viewed as a visual representation of empirical research. The model also draws upon the concept of Johari Window (Luft and Ingham, 1955) which is a well-known heuristic device from psychology. Intersectionality too may be conceived of as a heuristic (Collins, 2019) and therefore such a model for self-help or practitioner use may be further seen as complementary to this endeavour.

3.6 Ethical issues

Ethics are at the heart of ontological and epistemological framing of this study. They play a key role in critical inquiry, intersectionality and autoethnography. Ethical research benefits and empowers participants as well as simply preventing harm (Denzin, 1989; Peled and Leichtentritt, 2002; Christians, 2011). Ethics, as practiced by institutions, have their antecedents in biomedical research (Dingwall, 2008; Christians, 2011). Feminists have moved beyond this limiting understanding through participative approaches (Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008). Doucet (2008) suggests that good ethical practice begins with questioning why you are

undertaking a particular piece of research. For me, this was about wanting to help others who may be experiencing DVA. This study, as previously stated, is strongly linked with social justice. Whilst there is much discussion about ethics, very little of it is directional for an autoethnographical study of this type. I therefore used as the basis for my study Tolich's (2010) guidelines for autoethnographers (see Appendix 10), whilst keeping in cognisance paradigmatic and epistemological values and ethical perspectives.

I gained ethical approval from, and acted in accordance with the protocol of, the *University of Wolverhampton Institute of Health Ethics Committee* within the *Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing* (Appendix 3). Group moderators were sent a letter asking for consent to recruit and an information sheet, along with a consent form (see Appendices 4, 5 and 6 respectively). Participants were given a letter (Appendix 7) and an information sheet (Appendix 5) highlighting the purpose of the study, along with a consent form (Appendix 8).

Participants were given the opportunity and time to consider whether to participate and gain more information, if required. Guidance was offered on what the interview process would entail and confidentiality was assured. Written consent was gained prior to the study's commencement via the afore mentioned consent form (Appendix 8). They understood that participation was voluntary with the right to withdraw up until the point that analysis

commenced (as specified in the consent form). I was mindful of the potential need for a more supportive debriefing; therefore, a debriefing protocol was created for this purpose (Appendix 9). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and stored in a secure facility in my home and on a password protected computer.

3.6(1) Relational ethics

Relational ethics is articulated by Ellis (2007) as an ethics of care that is related to feminist ethics and feminist communitarian ethics (Denzin, 1997). In feminist communitarian approaches ethics are contextual and may be considered relational to a broader group. The researcher is required not simply to abide by their professional code of ethics but to abide by 'situated moral rules that are grounded in … the group understanding' (Denzin, 1997, p.227). Ellis (2007) describes the difficulty in defining relational ethics. She states that there are no rules, but instead, principles that move beyond not doing harm. Ellis (2007) articulates that it is about self-questioning, reflexivity and cites Lincoln (1995, p.285) in articulating that it places value upon 'mutual respect, dignity, and the connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work'.

Ellis (2007) articulates that relational ethics is about building relationships with participants that may endure beyond the research process as a part of that connectedness. Other ethnographic research approaches expect the

researcher to leave the field, but this approach is not appropriate in all studies (Tillmann-Healy, 2003; Ellis, 2007). As a member of the online community, and more widely the gay community, this approach entirely fits with my study. It would not be ethical to attempt to extricate myself from the community following such a study and it would appear as if I had simply purported to be a full member of the community to undertake the research. This would be the antithesis of good ethical research and undermine the social justice objective of the study.

Although undertaking dyadic interviews I was careful to ensure that the focus of the participants' interviews was on their story. Whilst I wanted the data from the interview (which is the purpose of interviewing) the relationship was attended to carefully. Within this style of interviewing there is co-construction; participants can reflect on their stories and might think them through differently during the discussion. From an ethical point of view, and in keeping with Ellis' (2004) view of good practice in dyadic interviewing, I wanted to ensure that I did not use what were ostensibly their interviews to discuss my story (as this would not be appropriate), but that I gave enough of myself for a full member discussion.

On the one hand this is an act of caring, since I would not want a participant to be emotionally affected by my story, however, it had a limiting effect on the level of collaboration possible. Whilst I welcome the possibility of being more collaborative in my approach, the objective of this study also

precluded this. However, the spirit of collaboration was honoured through discussions about data handling, in line with a feminist communitarian approach (Christians, 2011) and the results and interpretations were shared. Participants were offered opportunities to make comments on data analysis as well as simply their transcripts. A participant stated she had benefitted from involvement in the study and conveyed that she felt she had been a part of doing something that might help others in the community (see Appendix 13).

One of the biggest challenges of this project has been the telling of stories that implicate others through their telling (Ellis, 2007; Chang, 2008; Roth, 2009). These concerns were magnified in this study as some of those others are implicated as perpetrators. Tolich (2010) suggests that where risk to other people or the self cannot be sufficiently minimised, pseudonyms should be used. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this study and any identifying features or geographical locations have been removed in an effort to protect those portrayed as perpetrators. For the participants (other than myself), complete confidentiality has thus been assured; it is obviously not possible to completely obscure my identity or story when writing an autoethnography.

I have considered carefully any story involving others who might be able to be connected to me resulting in rigorously obscuring any identifying factors. I have also withheld aspects of my story that may impact on others. I have

held in mind at all times the principle outlined by Tolich (2010) that anyone written about may, at some point in time, read the work. I have highlighted also the nature of the accounts as stories, not facts. I had considered the use of composite characters (Ellis, 2004) at the outset of the study, but felt that my authenticity and credibility could be compromised by doing so; one cannot write about a hidden and suppressed issue within a marginalised community, from a suppressed and hidden position, whilst claiming authenticity and credibility, moreover, that position would be antithetical.

3.7 Quality and rigour of the study

Much is written about rigour in qualitative studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that trustworthiness is assessed via meeting the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Manning (1997) suggests that these criteria are parallel to quantitative research criteria and stresses the usefulness of the concept of authenticity (drawing on Guba and Lincoln (1989)). Although it would, of course, be possible to evaluate this project against either set of criteria (Lincoln and Guba (1985) or Guba and Lincoln (1989) the latter has been predominantly utilised. This study has utilised an interpretive grounded approach to data analysis alongside autoethnography, however it has also drawn upon standpoint theory, intersectionality and feminist approaches to research.

There are strikingly different study rigour criteria as applied to analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 1996). These are complete member

researcher status, analytic reflexivity, narrative visibility of the researcher's self (albeit in pseudonymous form), dialogue with informants beyond the self and a commitment to theoretical analysis. I have also utilised Guba and Lincoln's (1989) authenticity criteria in this study. There are five types of authenticity: fairness, ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical. I will briefly review the aspects of this study pertaining to each area. I have throughout this methodology referred to ensuring the participants' unmediated voices be heard throughout the results and interpretations feeding into the analysis and discussion.

My approach has ensured their voices equal received weighting. This exemplifies a position of fairness. I have out of a commitment to fairness engaged in processes linked to it (as discussed by Manning, 1997). These are informed consent (and the use of pseudonyms to protect participants), member checking, engaging with participants over an elongated period rather than observing the field and exiting. I have engaged with persistent observation through iterative data analysis and acted reflexively in response to those observations. I have ensured debriefing was available and engaged in it appropriately, neither overstating my ability to assist, nor understating it, for example I have redirected perceived vulnerable people to appropriate services. This was in the case of women who volunteered to participate in the research but had not been out of their abusive relationships long enough to meet the ethical requirements.

In dealing with ontological authenticity, I have engaged in dyadic interviewing and allowed dialogic spaces for emerging themes rather than those brought by the researcher to the study. I have been open in my research purpose and discussed with participants the changing direction of the study. I have focused on our emic perspectives and the rich data it yielded through a constructive relationship with participants and a participant has attested to personal benefit from engagement (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) (see Appendix 13). Whilst educative authenticity has not been a predominant part of the research (for the two participants whose stories were used, rather than me) they are now more aware of patterns of abuse rather than feeling that these are isolated and individual experiences. Participants have been offered the opportunity to read the study and one has stated they would like to do so at completion (see Appendix 13).

Catalytic authenticity has yet to be fully realised (as indeed, implied by the term) but there is a firm commitment to furthering social justice through enhancement to teaching and dissemination of research findings. Potential for catalytic authenticity has also been demonstrated through the creation of a model for practical use. The narrative and dialogue contained within Chapter 4 will be utilised in the teaching of undergraduates as will the model. In addition, the model has potential to be adapted for use with other intersectional identities that may experience abuse on the basis of their identity. Permission has been granted for this from the participants, which

is demonstrative of the final criteria of tactical authenticity (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Manning, 1997). This will be done alongside continued endeavours to ensure the confidentiality of identity of those who took part in the production of the research.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has discussed my approach to my study. It has discussed in detail my positioning within my selected paradigm and examined my research design. It has focused on axiological considerations in line with the paradigm of critical inquiry and my conceptual frameworks of standpoint theory and intersectionality. It has demonstrated reflexivity in the decision making throughout the process of the research as necessitated by the process. The next chapter presents the results and the interpretations of the study, in thematic form, and the stories of the participants.

Chapter 4: Results and Interpretations

4.1 Introduction

The results and interpretations chapter presents the stories, perspectives and analytic interpretations derived from a thematic analysis of interactive interviews and an artefact, in this case a journal extract. Data is presented in ethnographic form with the use of one extended narrative and one dialogue. The author's voice is utilised in third person to create 'psychic distance' between the author and the text (Wyatt, 2006), to give weight to and allow the expression of others (Ellis, 2004) and for reasons of relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). No data within the accounts has been fictionalised, but for ethical reasons some details have been obscured or altered (for a full account of the methods see Chapter 3). The stories presented have use as case studies that illustrate identity abuse and intersectionality.

4.2 The participants' relationships

The three female participants identify as gay, they are white and from semi-rural locations. They have all been in relationships where they experienced physical and emotional forms of abuse constituting self-identified DVA. The data in this chapter relates particularly to the relationships characterised by DVA that the participants chose to bring to the study:

Loz discussed her nine year relationship with her civil partner, Jane. Loz and Jane had been friends for a number of years before forming a relationship. After three years they entered into a civil partnership. Loz was 37 at the point of interview.

Rachel discussed her three year 'on-off' relationship with her girlfriend, Chris. There was one short period where her girlfriend stayed with her (following a house move) which did not result in cohabitation, but in living separately. Both Rachel and Chris, at that time, were in civil partnerships (with other people) that had separated, but not been dissolved. Rachel has a son, James, who was aged six at the time the relationship started. Rachel was 45 at the point of interview.

Stella discussed her civil partnership with Mags and her subsequent relationship with Fiona. Stella was with Mags for three years, entering into a civil partnership after one year. The relationship split two years into the civil partnership and a two-year separation followed. They engaged in period of reconciliation following the separation which lasted for only a very short period. Stella subsequently became involved with Fiona, which was an 'on-off' relationship lasting for about 18 months. Stella has an adult son from a heterosexual marriage. Stella stated that she experienced no DVA in her relationship with her husband. Stella was 53 at the point of interview.

4.3 Recognition of abuse

The participants have all experienced more than one relationship characterised by DVA. Recognition of abuse in their relationships varied, with different women recognising differing aspects of abuse in differing relationships. Some facets of abuse remained overlooked for some years after the event. The participants were more able to identify DVA in their

relationships when physical abuse had occurred. The presence of physical abuse enabled greater levels of both retrospective and synchronous cognition.

4.3(1) Physical abuse

Physical violence was the most readily identifiable form of abuse for the participants. It was manifested in different ways and over differing timescales in the participants' relationships. This section explicates the participants' experiences of physical violence in their relationships through the use of vignettes to set the scene. It is not the intention to privilege physical abuse over other forms of abuse by considering it first, but rather, to echo their entry points into understanding their journeys.

4.3(1-1) An account of ongoing physical abuse

Loz's experience of physical violence started three months into her nine-year relationship with Jane. On the first occasion that physical violence was used Loz's partner, Jane, was drunk, but this pattern subsequently changed:

> First violence was about 3 months into it, and then, maybe about another 3 months after, yeah, about 6 or 7 months then it started kinda happening without the drink …that's when I had to start pinning her down, erm, roundabout the 6 months …to fucking stop her from going mental. [Loz, Lns 917-923]

It is clear that physical violence is unacceptable to Loz because she attempted to restrain Jane in acts of self-defence. This pattern of asymmetrical abuse with Jane as the primary aggressor continued. Loz also talked about not retaliating against Jane initially for fear that she would

hurt her and comments, 'I never ever, ever, hit her because I knew if I did when she was drunk, I knew I would do some damage'. Loz recounts more minor acts of physical abuse, saying 'it got trivial as well, she used to pull covers off the bed, she'd used to actually pull the covers off the bed and I'd be trying to sleep'. Loz's perception of this as 'trivial' minimises the abuse and the cumulative effects of it on her.

Loz perceived the physical violence in her and Jane's relationship to have extended out of arguments. Loz considers arguments to be part of any relationship. When asked what the arguments were about, she said it was 'just typical argument. Just like shit arguments over nothing' which would result in Jane going 'ape shit'. Initially Loz would try to leave the situation, which would result in a physically violent altercation:

> A couple of times in the beginning, I've been going to walk out the flat, and she'd grab my legs, begging me not to go, "Don't leave, don't leave, don't leave," and I'm like, "Just get the hell off me," and so it went from that to the punching and kicking and the everything else, so it just, it, none of that added up to me. [Loz, Lns 896-900]

This quote demonstrates Loz's belief that the physical violence was rooted in problems in the relationship, with Loz trying to make sense of Jane's actions. Loz clearly felt that Jane was trying to remedy some kind of problem in the relationship that was at the heart of the argument and therefore struggled to understand the context of the violence. She was bewildered by the experience. Loz did not see the physical violence as about power and control, but instead, as a dysfunctional affirmation of love from her abusive partner.

The physical violence continued to escalate in frequency and severity, with Loz being routinely injured as the relationship continued, culminating on one occasion with Loz physically retaliating. She said, 'It was only twice I ever punched her and that was to basically end of, to stop her from biting and kicking'. Loz was candid about the injuries she had received and how she felt at that time:

> Oh, bite marks and everything yeah, bite marks, scratch marks, down my face, down my arms, down my back, kicked me in the stomach, massive bruise off of that, so yeah, I was quite bashed up, quite a few times and I still never retaliated until obviously, I got to that point where I had had enough. [Loz, Lns 198-202]

From Loz's perspective, restraint had failed to stop reoccurrence of the violence. Loz's comment that she 'had had enough' refers only to the physical violence in the relationship not the relationship itself, as she continued on in the relationship for a number of years. It is clear that Loz conceived of the physical violence as being part of a relationship problem, as she further articulated that she 'wanted to try and sort it'. Loz stated that the physical violence significantly reduced after her act of retaliation. In retaliating, and thereafter, the threat of retaliation - 'I told her, "you do it again and basically, I'm gonna knock fuck out of you,"' - Loz had found a way to quell the physical violence.

Loz did not tell anyone about the level of physical violence in the relationship at the time because she felt she 'could handle her'. This statement could be seen as bravado, but it potentially also implies that Loz thought that it was her responsibility to manage the relationship and her

partner's behaviour. Loz would have called the police 'if she'd have brandished a weapon or anything like that' but made a joke about Jane's father being in the police and this limiting her likelihood of reporting her.

There was, however, one notable occasion of physical violence (subsequent to her act of retaliation) when physical violence became visible to outsiders, resulting in police involvement. Loz and Jane were staying at some friends' house a few hours away from home for a party. Loz had got 'absolutely wasted' and 'passed out at the top of the stair'. Jane, who was also 'absolutely wasted, started accusing [her] of kissing this girl and going absolutely mental trying to punch and kick [her] and all that again'. Their friends made Jane leave. After Jane had been ejected from the party, she threw her mobile phone through the back windscreen of the car they had hired to get there.

Loz says that she phoned the police on this occasion 'probably 'cause it wasn't in our own place, probably 'cause it was in someone else's, someone else's house'. Loz felt that she 'had to take charge of the situation'. This again indicates that Loz knew that the physical abuse perpetrated against her was unacceptable. Furthermore, it denotes a level of embarrassment should she be seen not to respond appropriately to the physical violence. It may also, however, serve to further privatise the physical violence in their relationship, by erroneously giving the impression to others that Loz would *alway*s *act* if on the receiving end of violence thus disguising the nature of

the relationship. Through calling the Police on this *one and only* occasion, Loz can be seen to be taking complete responsibility for the relationship, including managing her abusive partner's behaviour. Some commonality of responses can be drawn between Loz's accounts of ongoing physical violence and Rachel's experiences.

4.3(1-2) An account of sporadic physical abuse

The first act of physical violence Rachel described was when she too tried to leave during what she would describe as an 'incident'. Rachel left her bedroom where she and her partner Chris were arguing. Chris had taken Rachel's phone and was pretending to call the police to make a false allegation about Rachel using physical violence against her. Rachel left the room closing the door behind her and picked up her son (aged six) who was crying outside. She walked along the landing and as she did so Chris 'opened the bedroom door and she… she had a photograph frame in her hand'. Chris threw it at Rachel, hitting her on the back of the head, breaking both the frame and the glass in it. Rachel did not describe this act as physical violence but used it as an example of mind games that Chris would play, which she articulated as Chris 'would twist things around'. Rachel had other experiences of physical abuse that she also did not identify as physical abuse. These included being locked out of her own home and being stalked by Chris both during and after the relationship. She states:

> I wouldn't even walk across my hallway. I wouldn't have the lights on where they could be seen from outside of the house. I would hide the car in the garage. I would not have sound on if I thought that she was outside, I would keep James away from the hallway so that he couldn't be seen if you tried to look through the letterbox. I would

> always make sure that the back gate was constantly locked so that she couldn't come through it. [Rachel, Lns 1377-1383]

Despite the fact that Rachel's every day activities were affected, and she was made fearful by the stalking, she did not conceive of it as physical violence. Rachel normalised these behaviours as Chris wanting 'to talk about the relationship'.

Rachel was most troubled by the time that Chris had given her a black eye and readily identified this as physical abuse. Rachel describes a scene in which she, James and Chris were in her lounge having a nice time. She described Chris as being 'in a happy, jovial mood and then all of a sudden there was a quick change in her'. Rachel sent James to bed and removed herself to a different part of the house. She explains:

> I knew something was going to go off and I didn't want James to hear. She came over to me when I was stood by the sideboard… and said, "I didn't want to have to do this," took my glasses off my face and hit me, in the face, with absolutely no warning. She punched me. [Rachel, Lns 722-726]

Rachel's comment about 'no warning' displays her shock and bewilderment at what happened. Rachel left the relationship with Chris at this point because she said she 'won't tolerate violence or infidelity'. She subsequently got back together with her about three months later for a variety of reasons, including Chris threatening physical harm towards someone Rachel cared about; she said she would 'cut her brakes' and she would 'have her'. Rachel also described herself, more than once, as being 'ground down'. She was often worried about threats that Chris made. Rachel

felt that Chris ‘was still harassing [her] constantly and that harassment wasn't going away’. Nevertheless, the black eye marked a turning point in the relationship, and she began to see other abusive behaviours as abusive.

It could be suggested that an assault in the form of ‘punching’ is easily identifiable as DVA, as it exemplifies commonplace heteronormative narratives of domestic violence; punching particularly has an association with masculine forms of assault. For Rachel, it brought the entire relationship into sharp focus. She, like Loz, created a strategy from within the relationship, in order to manage it, although for Rachel it was a conscious strategy of ending the relationship slowly, rather than working out how to live with physical violence. Rachel said that ‘over a period of time [she] distanced [Chris]’. This meant that Rachel experienced other ongoing forms of abuse, as well as sporadic episodes of less easily identifiable physical violence, over a prolonged period of time which had a cumulative impact on her emotionally. Rachel confirms this by articulating:

> The physical stuff wasn't that much, it was more emotional. Yeah and I would always have said, I’d always have said, I’d rather she’d have given me a thousand black eyes than do what she did. [Rachel, Lns 574-576].

Although Rachel only identified some of the physical abuse in the relationship, she suggests that it was not the most prominent or pervasive form of abuse that she experienced. This could be interpreted as the emotional harm of both the physical and emotional abuse being more significant for Rachel than the physical harm it caused her.

4.3(1-3) An account of physical abuse that ended a relationship

The physical violence in Stella's relationship took place over a three-day period. Her fear and trauma are exceptionally evident in her narration of the episode:

> […] she just flipped like flicking a light switch and it was just like absolutely crazy; glasses thrown, knives thrown, hands round the neck, head banged against the wall and all of that sort of stuff, so…we were actually trying again when she flipped. So, she'd got plans to move in with me in ****** and then she flipped and that was it, because she was actually stopping at my flat at the time. So obviously, that was it. I was held prisoner for two days in the flat. So yeah, it was sort of pretty, pretty horrific… I didn't dare go past her. She'd pretend to be asleep and as soon as I moved... I couldn't even go to the toilet. I couldn't – I'd got to walk past her to go to the toilet, so I couldn't even do that without the fear. It was just so scary because you could see it in her eyes. You could see the, the actual e-, evilness in her eyes, and if I'd have gone to the – 'cause it was an upstairs flat, if I'd have gone to the stairs, I knew full well I'd have been pushed down and I wouldn't have been here now 'cause it was stone at the bottom. So, there'd have been not a cat in hell's chance. So, I just didn't even attempt and then she smashed my glasses and when we went to the opticians about three days later, I persuaded her to take me to the opticians in ****** and, and they were screwed into a ball. The guy asked me how it had happened and I could feel her eyes on me, so I just had to say I stood on them and then on the way back to ******, she grabbed the wheel of the van, because I was driving, and tried to put it off the road. Totally demolished one of the wheels and then the verbal started. She told me she was going to kill us both erm, and we got to where [the pub] is and she basically – well, the verbal again. It's like, "Pull off the fucking road. I'm telling you now". There was a lot of anger in her voice. Pulled off the road. I didn't dare to anything else. I grabbed the keys out of the ignition and she was after the keys and I said, "No". I don't know how the hell I got the guts. It was across the road from a pub… So, she er – I started hitting out. So, I got out of the van with the keys in my hand and because I wouldn't give her the keys back, she started back in the van about that. So, I ran across the road to the, to the [pub] and when I got across the road, she grabbed me from behind. We stepped up into the pub and she grabbed me, so I, I just started screaming. Erm, it's the first time in my life I've ever screamed [laughter] but er, three blokes come out the pub, took me inside. They saw what had happened with the van 'cause they were watching through the window. Took me in, called the Police and then they – the Police, caught her just up the road 'cause she'd walked off. She was

> heading back towards the flat. [Stella, Lns 26-29, 33-37, 39-59 and 64-73]

Stella's story is one of *escape*. *The relationship ended there and then.* Stella stipulated: 'One thing I'd never stand for in a relationship is violence, so when she tried to kill me, that was it.' The experience that Stella survived had involved threats, intimidation, isolation, economic abuse through the destruction of her glasses and her van (that she used for work). There were various forms of physical abuse present ranging from locking her in to throwing objects and to the numerous physical assaults that took place. The attack on Stella resulted in 'bruises on [her] face, bruises on [her] neck' and a 'lump on [her] head. Stella's use of terms such as 'flipped' and 'crazy', demonstrated that, like Loz and Rachel, she felt bewildered by what was happening. Stella is really clear that 'affairs and violence are the two things that [she] won't put up with'. The only way that Stella can give meaning to her account of DVA for herself, and others, is encapsulated in her later statement, 'she was just like a - she was like a bloke'.

Stella was only able to comprehend and explain what had happened to her through the hegemonic heteronormative social construction of what constitutes DVA. Stella talked about two relationships in interview, of her second relationship she said, 'I just thought it was childish games at the time, but I mean looking back on it, it is abusive, isn't it, 'cause it's mental abuse?'. When talking about both relationships, Stella said, 'I think the first one was the domestic violence and abuse. Erm, the second one was *just*

verbal abuse' [emphasis mine]. The privileging of physical forms of abuse in heteronormative constructions of DVA meant that Stella remained in an abusive relationship for longer than she might otherwise have done.

Although Stella understood that she was experiencing abuse in her second relationship, she was unable to concurrently understand the gravity of her own position. It was only when Stella thought there might be the possibility of physical violence that she left that relationship. She commented, 'I wasn't going to go through it again'. By that time however, Stella had already experienced a significant amount of abuse in varying forms, indicating a pattern of coercive control and abuse, that she described as 'just verbal abuse'. Within the course of the interview Stella came to understand some of her experiences as emotional abuse through the processing of her own account.

4.3(1-4) Bringing together the accounts of physical abuse

It is notable from within the accounts that all three participants brought to their relationships two 'rules'. All participants wanted a relationship free of violence and infidelity. This could be summed up colloquially as, 'don't beat, don't cheat'. Whilst Loz was in a relationship with violence as a distinguishing characteristic, she managed the violence in the relationship initially through forming an asymmetrical pattern of abuse (with Jane as the primary aggressor) by using restraint. Subsequently, an act of retaliation brought to a close most of the violence in the relationship, with

only sporadic violence subsequently occurring. Rachel experienced only sporadic violence throughout her relationship and Stella experienced a traumatic violent episode that brought her relationship to an end. Loz was able to define her relationship as one that was characterised by DVA from almost the outset of the relationship, but managing the physical abuse and perceiving of it (even just initially) as a dysfunctional affirmation of love meant that she remained in the relationship.

Rachel struggled to identify some acts of physical abuse in her relationship. She was able to recognise, from what may have appeared as an isolated incident of DVA, the possibility that it was part of a pattern of coercive control. She was able to begin to explore the nature of the relationship, which may otherwise have gone undetected were it not for the physical violence. Stella experienced only one episode of physical violence before leaving her relationship. She was able to identify the abuse through its similarity to heteronormative social constructions of DVA and then retrospectively identify other abuse within that relationship. Furthermore, her experience of violence led her to leave a subsequent relationship, albeit only when the situation had escalated to the point that physical violence would have been a logical progression.

For all of the participants, acts of physical abuse that were easily identifiable were those that were familiar to them based on their existing knowledge of what constitutes DVA. Their existing knowledge was based on the

heteronormative construction of DVA. It was only once participants recognised physical abuse in their relationships that they were able to recognise that they had experienced other forms of abuse. Furthermore, the accounts of Loz and Rachel indicate that not all forms of physical abuse were as evident as others; some forms of physical abuse were obscured. Heteronormative accounts that define 'what DVA looks like' served to minimise the participants' ability to make sense of what was happening to them.

The limited and delineated narratives available reduced the participants' ability to interpret their experiences as DVA where physical violence was not (as in the case of Rachel), or had not been (as in the case of Stella), the predominant form of abuse they experienced. This is demonstrated most clearly in the participants' continual sense of bewilderment. It is clear that physical abuse did not take place in isolation from other forms of abuse, therefore, the following section considers the emotional abuse and the participants' recognition of it in their relationships.

4.3(2) Emotional abuse

With the exception of Loz, who reported the co-existence of physical abuse and emotional abuse, emotional abuse preceded physical abuse. For Rachel and Stella, it was the predominant form of abuse experienced. There were many examples of emotional abuse that were discussed by the participants during the study, not all of which can be drawn upon here. After

contextualising the emotional abuse experienced by the participants and their (lack of) recognition of it, focus is given to the participants' identities, socio-cultural positioning and sense of belonging as influencing and sculpting factors that became facilitative in the perpetration of DVA against them. Their accounts are interwoven to draw out the commonalities and variations in experiences.

4.3(2-1) The lexicon that minimises emotional abuse

Loz demonstrated insight into the aim and impact of the abuse she experienced when she described Jane as 'verbally violent'. However, in general, participants used terms that diminished and obscured their experiences. When describing forms of abuse that were emotional, two participants found it difficult to discern the nature of the abusive tactics being utilised. Rachel and Stella referred frequently to 'verbal abuse' and 'moods'. Rachel referred to Chris's behaviour using terms such as 'verbally nasty', 'verbally abusive', 'moody' and 'difficult'. She then described a host of emotionally abusive behaviours, stating that Chris would 'put [her] down in front of her [Chris's] friends', 'make jokes at [her] expense', 'humiliate' her, 'send [her] to Coventry', use 'constant putdowns', and be negative about James and her parenting of him. Stella used the adjective 'verbal' also when stating that the abuse in her relationship with Mags 'started off as – of – as verbal for quite a few years'. The adjective 'verbal' acted as a nebulous classification for any act that was not explicitly physical, for example, Stella cites the use of threats and intimidation but articulated it

as 'Well, the verbal again. It's like, "Pull off the fucking road. I'm telling you now"'.

The relationship that Stella describes as 'just verbally abusive' was with Fiona, but like Rachel, she describes other facets of the relationship that were emotionally abusive, for example, she says that when Fiona's daughter moved in (to her house, without consent), her and Fiona 'were taking over; they were doing what they wanted to do; they wanted waiting on, hand and foot'. This is a clear exemplar of entitlement abuse. Stella too, described her partners as moody, recalling, 'I had that off both of them erm, because Mags was the same [as Fiona] – exactly the same erm, and yeah, she'd either be moody and horrible when I got back or as soon as I walked in the door, she'd walk out and go somewhere else'. Controlling behaviours were often utilised to isolate, but were demonstrably subtler than, for example, not *letting* participants see family and friends. It was only during interview that Stella started to process Fiona's and Mag's isolation tactics. She said, 'I just thought it was childish games at the time, but I mean looking back on it, it is abusive, isn't it, 'cause it's mental abuse?'. Stella proceeded to recount that Fiona 'was horrible to [her] friends and [her] family at the funeral erm, so [they] had a bit of a do over that'. Resistance to control and isolation often caused some kind of conflict or negative atmosphere ('moods' or 'silence') which were then subsequently interpreted as 'arguments' and as 'not getting on'; these then came to be perceived as signs of 'relationships problems'. Understanding the

relationship in terms of 'relationship problems' further resulted in the perception of mutual responsibility for conflicts and/or negative atmospheres and thus, shrouded the emotional abuse taking place.

4.3(2-2) Arguments and relationship problems

The following dialogue, drawn from an artefact (a journal in which the participant recorded a text exchange), illustrates an 'argument' caused by resistance to isolation tactics:

Dialogue - The 'Argument'
Chris: 'You never loved me. As I always said and always knew, you loved Louise and your son, and do ya know I was happier in that year without a partner when I could shag when I wanted and no hassle, so yeah, goodbye Rachel, hello one-night stands starting tomorrow. I hope you and Louise will be very happy.'
Rachel: 'I don't love Louise. She is my FRIEND.'
Chris: 'Goodbye forever, if you ever want to choose me drop me a line and see if I'm free, otherwise have a good life.'
Rachel: 'Louise is my friend, that's all.'
Chris: 'She was more than JUST A FRIEND. Sue was a friend, Amanda was a friend, and Saanvi was a friend. She was so, so, so, so, much more!'
Chris: 'You need so many other people in your life and that is fine, but it's what I can't cope with. I don't blame you for blaming me, I probably did expect too much. One day though I'd like to put the record straight.'
Chris: 'I accept I did not accept one of your friendships, but only one, and this is compounded by her knowing all our business and as I say one day I'll put the record straight if I get the chance, although it does upset me to hear you say you think our whole relationship went wrong because of your friendship with Louise. I guess I'm upset cos if that was the only reason, then I am sad that I wasn't worth you forfeiting that for us.'
Rachel: 'I don't think I said that our relationship went wrong because of Louise.'
Chris: 'You see, even now you are not bothered about me. It's all about Louise!'
One day later, via text message…

> *Chris: 'I won't message you again after this unless you want me to, baby, but I need to say that I do want to be with you always and forever and I'm truly sorry that there have been so many problems in our relationship. I love you, need you and want you but I'm assuming that it's too late for me to say all that or to fight for you.'*

In the dialogue, it can be seen Chris wants Rachel to end her friendship with Louise. Chris uses coercion and threats together with emotional abuse. Chris attempts to make Rachel feel guilty ['you never loved me'/ 'you loved Louise'/ 'you are not bothered about me'] and makes threats to end the relationship [through saying 'goodbye forever' and 'otherwise have a good life'] but also making it clear that Rachel can get the relationship back ['if you ever want to choose me']. She also attempts to get Rachel to comply through threats to engage in sexual relations with others imminently ['one-night stands starting tomorrow'] because this might make Rachel jealous and/or upset.

Chris puts Rachel down subtly by implying that she is only good for sex, because the rest of the relationship is just 'hassle' ['shag when I wanted and no hassle so yeah, goodbye Rachel']. Chris attempts to control who Rachel can be friends with by giving her a list of people that are still acceptable to her as friends. However, she straightaway rescinds this, by telling Rachel what her needs are, that is, for Rachel to have fewer friends and trying to explain away her behaviour through her neediness [You need

so many other people in your life and that is fine, but it's what I can't cope with].

Chris is emotionally abusive by falsely accusing Rachel of infidelity ['She was more than JUST A FRIEND'/ 'She was so, so, so, so, much more!'/ 'I hope you and Louise will be very happy']. Chris attempts to manipulate Rachel through guilt [I don't blame you for blaming me, I probably did expect too much] from which she hopes to coerce Rachel into giving into her demand to give up her friendship. Through her use of the past tense all the way through the dialogue we can say that Chris wants to make it sound like she has ended the relationship and that Rachel needs to do something to get it back, in this case, to stop being friends with Louise ['if you ever want to choose me'/ 'otherwise have a good life'].

Chris uses guilt again and implies that Rachel lacks loyalty to the relationship and doesn't want it as much as she does ['I am sad that I wasn't worth you forfeiting that for us']. Chris's use of the word 'forfeit' stands out as it exposes that this is a punishment for Rachel because to 'forfeit' is 'to lose or be deprived of (property or a right or privilege) as a penalty for wrongdoing' (*Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2010).

In the final piece of the dialogue (the text message), Chris implies that Rachel has some control in the situation and that Chris has respect for her wishes ['I won't message you again after this unless you want me to'] as

part of trying to persuade her to stay in the relationship. Chris uses discourses of love and reciprocated care to try to get Rachel back [‘I do want to be with you always and forever’/ ‘I love you, need you and want you’]. She then tries to propagate the idea that they have ‘relationship problems’ [our whole relationship went wrong because of your friendship with Louise], which diverts attention away from and minimises the DVA perpetrated/experienced and suggests mutual responsibility.

The idea that DVA in the relationship should be conceived of as a ‘relationship problem’ is also signified earlier when Chris attempts to isolate Rachel by controlling what she says to people [because she doesn’t want Louise ‘knowing all our business’]. This is done because relationship problems are seen as private problems. Chris tries to invoke their relationship bond [by calling Rachel, ‘baby’,] to obligate Rachel to respond. She says that she is ‘truly sorry’ for these problems, indicating that she accepts her part in the shared responsibility and thereby invites/obligates Rachel to accept hers. Finally, Chris invokes a discourse of romance around missed opportunities and fighting for love [I'm assuming that it's too late for me to say all that or to fight for you]. The overall tone of the message is contrite in order to elicit forgiveness, albeit that she has not actually apologised for any of her abusive behaviours. *Rachel took Chris back.*

It is evident that the participants experienced emotional abuse in many guises which they generally labelled as ‘verbal abuse’, ‘moodiness’ or ‘being

difficult'. Whilst it is not of importance that a survivor can *classify* the abuse that they have experienced, and many acts of abuse do not fit into a neat typology, often encompassing more than one type of abuse, being unable to recognise abuse as something other than moodiness or being difficult, is crucial to understanding patterns of coercive control and DVA. Umbrella terms such as 'verbal abuse' or the reframing of resistance as 'arguments' served to both minimise and obscure the abuse taking place. Being unable to contextualise abusive behaviours and actions contemporaneously, or even at all, left Loz, Rachel and Stella, open to conceiving of DVA as 'arguments' and 'relationship problems'.

4.4 Identity: Making sense of the abuse

Whilst Loz, Rachel and Stella could not always recognise the abuse they were experiencing, they also struggled to make sense of it. This section considers the socio-cultural paradigms of the participants with specific reference to their identities, their relationships, and their sense of belonging. This involves consideration of the participants' families of origin, their relationships with their families, family perspectives on same sex relationships and the standpoint of the participants towards relationships in general.

4.4(1) Identity: Family

All of the participants' parents identified as heterosexual. Loz's parents have been married for over 50 years (and are both still living), whilst

Rachel's parents were married for more than 40 years (before her mother died), and Stella's parents were married for over 60 years (before her father died). Loz describes herself as close to both her parents, whilst Rachel was close to her mother and Stella was close to her father. Loz says that her father has '[n]ever laid his hands on [her] mum' but yet she recalled times when he was 'fucking shouting and bawling' and 'would just throw stuff … just wreck everything'.

Loz also talked about an occasion when her father was unfaithful to her mother, stating that it was 'the biggest mistake of his life'. There was no physical violence in Stella's parents' relationship either. Stella describes her mother as 'quite controlling', 'very critical' and a worrier. Stella is mildly aggrieved by her worrying but still 'phone[s] her every night… to let her know that [she's] at home and it's like, "I'm 53. Come on"'. Rachel depicted her family life through the statement: 'I'd grown up in the middle of world war three'. She provides an insight into her parental home, including the normalised roles within it, when she commented that her mother needed to 'manage [her] father's behaviour'.

Two of the participants did not tell their parents about their entering into civil partnerships. Rachel says she did not do so because it would have been too difficult to manage on 'the day'. Although she thinks her family would have attended out of a sense of 'duty', her father 'would have a face on him all day'. Rachel described her father as 'homophobic'. To enter into such a

relationship would be seen by her family as undesirable. Stella said, of her parents, that 'there's a little bit of homophobia there' and says her parents were 'totally against gay marriage'.

Stella states that her mother's position on her sexuality is that 'she accepts it but she doesn't like it'. She does not really understand why her parents held this perspective and stated that they were 'not overly religious'. Stella did not tell her parents that she had entered into a civil partnership because it would not be 'accepted' and furthermore, Stella feared it would result in ostracism. Stella's mother told her, 'if I find out that you're married to her, then that's it. I'm going to take you out of the will'. Through this action Stella's mother forbade her from entering into a civil partnership.

Loz's parents accept her sexuality and attended her civil partnership ceremony. She recounts that her father used to be 'really homophobic but [she] think[s] it was towards men'. She says that having a heart attack changed his outlook on life. When she told him about her sexuality he said, 'I don't care, I love you, you're my daughter'. Loz describes a comical conversation with her mother when coming out. Her mother was not happy that she had been 'hiding things' from her. Loz was 'going out to gay clubs' but saying she was 'going to straight clubs'. Loz's response to her mother was, 'that's what every gay person does … we all lie about where we're going'. Despite her parents open reception, Loz's comical tale betrays her fear of disapproval or rejection. It is as if she has learnt by osmosis that a

gay sexuality is not a preferred sexuality and is potentially a spurned sexuality.

Loz describes other family perspectives on her sexuality; she said her sister was worried for her and 'thought that when people found out they would beat [her] up'. Loz, displayed surprise that her father 'was the actual first person to talk to me about civil partnership, my dad that came to me, not my mum'. Through doing this Loz's father displays his socio-cultural positioning as being in favour of the heteronormative enactment of Loz and Jane's relationship, but in doing so, however inadvertently, he precludes any alternative relationship positioning. Loz stated her civil partner, Jane, '*actually*, she *literally*, became part of the family' [emphasis mine]. The relationship's demise was, therefore, burdensome on multiple levels. Loz recounts that her 'mum always used to say to [her] you always go chasing them'. Within this quote, in which Loz is gendered as masculine within normative relationship scripts, her mother is critiquing Loz as unsuccessful in love and almost desperate. Loz had achieved family acceptance of her sexuality and relationship through civil partnership. To risk the relationship breakdown was, to Loz, to risk epic failure.

It can be seen from the participants' socio-cultural backgrounds, that heteronormative relationship forms and scripts were not only dominant, but any notion of alternative relationship forms and scripts were rendered undesirable, prohibited or simply non-existent. The participants'

relationship rules of 'don't beat, don't cheat' can be seen to emanate from within these heteronormative scripts. Moreover, the participants' status in themselves, as individuals entering into civil partnerships, substantiates their absorption of these norms and scripts. Indeed, the absorption of the norm of marriage is so powerful that it consumed them; they would rather hide their status of 'married' than not actually be married and as Loz powerfully illuminated, they were used to hiding 'gay' from their families.

The participants, however, wanted their relationships to be seen as conventional despite being same sex relationships. Being seen as having conventional relationships was a legitimated passage to acceptance and acceptability. In addition, Loz, Rachel and Stella all learned scripts, from within their families, about the primacy of women's (their mother's) responsibility for emotionally taking care of the family. Loz and Rachel learned scripts that located potentially abusive acts as, part of, and to be managed within, enduring marriages. From this position, it becomes more complex to make sense of emotional abuse as something more than problems within a marriage. Being gay impacted on the participants' sense of belonging. Their need to belong in the heteronormative spheres that made up significant parts of their lives resulted in high levels of emotional investment in sustaining their relationships.

It is important to note that Loz, Rachel and Stella do not embody the gendering of heteronormativity in their physical appearances; they might,

in fact, be considered to contravene stereotypical gender norms. Loz referred to this as being 'an individual in respects to I'm covered in tattoos'. Loz, Rachel and Stella all feared and faced disapproval for their sexuality. Rachel and Stella feared disapproval or ostracism for getting married; they all three subsequently feared disapproval based on relationship break-ups. This logically becomes increasingly the case with any and every long-term relationship demise, thus leaving them more vulnerable to remaining in abusive relationships. It further serves to create possibilities for abuse as their vulnerabilities, resulting from this aspect of their identities, is palpable to abusive partners and would-be perpetrators.

4.4(2) Identity: Gay identity

The participants identified as gay women, but routinely just referred to themselves as gay. Loz particularly expressed a strong dislike of the term 'lesbian'. 'I fucking hate that word … but yes … I'm gay'. Rachel didn't refer to herself, in interview, by any term, but spoke of her sexuality through her accounts; she referred to Chris as her 'girlfriend' and Louise as her 'friend' connoting the difference in her relationships with them. Stella, although in a civil partnership, spoke of herself as 'married' and talked of getting a 'divorce', but never referred to her civil partner as her 'wife'. Only Rachel used the term '[ex-]wife' with reference to a same sex relationship, however, she referred to her own previous civil partner as her 'ex-civil partner'. Both the terms 'husband' and 'wife' were used with reference to the heterosexual relationships discussed. So, although the terms

‘marriage’/ ‘civil partnership’ and ‘dissolution’/ ‘divorce’ were used interchangeably, participants seemed less comfortable with, or perhaps less used to, using gendered spousal terms. Only Stella had had a previous heterosexual marriage, realising she was gay later in life, with the other two participants identifying as, and coming out as, gay, from a young age.

Stella viewed married life as being about spending time together and wanting to be with each other. She says that her civil partner ‘thought she could live a single life in a married relationship erm, and so she just basically – when [Stella] walked in from work, she’d go through the door and this is after a short time in the marriage’. Stella’s perception is that she would be the top priority for her partner rather than her partner going out ‘with her mates’. Mags had been in a same sex relationship previous to her partnership with Stella. Stella stated that Mags’s children had believed the break-up of that relationship to be down to her. Stella was surprised when Mags ‘sort of took the kids’ side, even though [they]’d gone through with the wedding’. Stella was happy during her heterosexual marriage and has wondered at times if she should have ‘hid her sexuality’ and remained in that relationship but said, ‘you can’t live a lie all your life …You’ve got to be who you are’. Being gay is so strongly part of Stella’s identity that she commented that ‘people who live in the closet must be totally screwed up ‘cause they can’t be themselves’. Stella feels that it doesn’t matter if you are gay or heterosexual as long as you are with the ‘right person’.

The ‘problems’ within, and break-ups of, the relationships resulted in participants both doubting and blaming themselves. As expressed previously, the success of the relationships were loaded with high levels of personal investment. The participants wondered if they had done enough to sustain the relationships or if they were somehow at fault. Rachel articulated that she ‘doubted [her]self continually’. Rachel attributed staying in her relationship to feeling that she ‘loved’ Chris and ‘feeling guilty’ for a variety of reasons. She was ‘deeply embarrassed about it all. You know, people start thinking it is you’. Loz similarly experienced self-doubt; ‘you doubt yourself, you start thinking that it’s you, yeah, all of those kinds of things it was just so much self-doubt it was unreal’.

Loz offered more than one account of why she remained in the relationship demonstrating her struggle in understanding it. She said: she ‘really [did]n’t know why [she] stayed’, she stayed because she’s ‘a fighter’, ‘[She] wanted to try and sort it’, she thought she was ‘at that stage in [her] life where… you think you need someone’, ‘you feel like you wanted someone to love you’ and she wondered whether she was ‘going to be on [her] own for the rest of [her] life’. The relationship ending meant she felt ‘like a failure’.

Stella’s disillusionment with same sex relationships spilled out in her perceptions of life in the gay community. She partially attributes her abusive relationships on the community commenting that there are ‘a lot

of screwed up women out there and men, but mainly women and especially in the gay community'. Because of this, she expressed that it may be better for her to remain single - 'Sometimes, I think I'm better off on my own'. Stella said that she should not have got involved with Fiona but that 'people show you attention, you go there, don't you?'. She also blamed herself, commenting, 'I seem to attract the same sort of person or seemed to do'. This was a sentiment also expressed by Loz in a rhetorical question: 'Fucking hell man, why do these people fucking come to me?'.

Stella was keen to point out that not all of her relationships have been abusive; she has had 'good ones with women in the past' which 'fizzled out erm, mainly through [her] own stupidity'. She had one relationship with a woman who her mum and dad 'thought the world of'. This ended because of her girlfriend's religion and a threat from her religious community that she would experience the 'loss of her family' if she continued in it. Rachel too had a positive experience with a woman who 'made her laugh' and she would have 'liked to have felt more for her than [she] did'. Stella's last relationship (with Fiona) became on and off, like Rachel's. It ended completely when Stella told Fiona not to contact her again. Stella conveyed her expectations of relationships when she explained her decision: 'She'd moved out. We weren't together as a couple which is, again – which is why she'd got no right being as verbally abusive as she was'.

4.5 Identity abuses: The weaponisation of physical and romantic intimacies

The participants' accounts demonstrate how much they wanted loving and fulfilling relationships; they wanted a partner that wanted them, just for being them. Loz and Stella articulated that they had felt 'used' in their relationships. Stella assisted Fiona with many jobs around her house and when she was ill. Stella says she was, in retrospect, 'a tool to be used' and Loz described Jane as 'a bit of a user', querying whether Jane wanted her around for her income. Stella commented that 'there'd been nothing physical for quite a while before [she and Fiona] split'. Fiona used the withdrawal of any kind of physical intimacy to assert control. When she and her adult daughter had taken over Stella's house and Stella had tried to make clear that this couldn't continue as a long-term arrangement, Stella would 'get pushed off' if she tried to put her arm round Fiona. The fear of, and/or the reality of, physical intimacy with others was also weaponised by abusive partners:

> I did find out that she was, again, playing away behind my back as well as Sarah's [Mags' ex]. I found out recently er, with men, so it was quite a worrying – bit of a worrying time as well. I mean the times I've sort of made phone calls and said, 'Have you seen her?' 'cause it's – you were talking the early hours of the morning before she even came back at times and that goes for both of them [Mags and Fiona]. They were both doing that but that was just – not because they wanted to; it was just to try and punish me. [Stella, Lns 409-416].

Stella pinpointed this behaviour as being about control. It has already been identified that participants brought two rules to relationships ('don't beat, don't cheat') and that these rules were central to their identities, thus breaching them purely to assert control or to exact punishment functioned

as a form of identity abuse: altercasting. Furthermore, as in the case of heterosexual relationships, there was no gendered script about masculinity and infidelity to explain away the behaviours.

Loz left her relationship because of infidelity. She has very strong beliefs regarding infidelity which she articulated numerous times:

> I hate, I hate, I hate cheating, I hate even, even, a fucking, a text: like an innocuous text but there's something behind it. I can't even stand that, to me that's cheating, that's the start of it. If you genuinely love that person you wouldn't be doing, anything else with the other person. [Loz, Lns 669-672]

Love and fidelity are inextricable for Loz. Acts of infidelity can therefore include emotional unfaithfulness or attempts to build a romantic or sexual relationship with someone else. For Loz, infidelity signalled that her partner did not love her which impacted on her sense of belonging in the relationship. Loz was certain that her partner had been unfaithful to her before, but she had 'denied everything'. Loz said it was 'the first time that kinda trust went'. Loz spoke about derogatory language and name calling that she endured, particularly around her weight - 'my weight was always the biggest thing' - she said 'it was like 2 1/2 years it before it ended. I was ready to get out then'. So, the second (known) infidelity, explained Loz, 'gave me my out'. Loz's investment in the relationship, together with her family history (her father's history of one infidelity), meant that she had given Jane one chance and felt justified in leaving. Loz was, in her own eyes, vindicated by Jane's actions and it would provide an acceptable explanation outwardly for the break up. *Loz went back to her parents*.

Within Rachel's relationship there was an 'ongoing liaison' and many (veiled) threats of infidelity which Rachel perceived were to 'make [her] jealous about it really'. Rachel, like Loz, was 'aware [she] needed to get out of the relationship'. The end came when Chris gave her an ultimatum which she said 'gave [her] the get out' she needed. Instead of getting back together with Chris, as has had happened before, Rachel refused to be pulled back in. Rachel's perception of Chris's actions as emotional blackmail meant she didn't feel 'used'. Rachel also experienced a related form of abuse through Chris's threats to end the relationship.

Rachel took these threats seriously resulting in her perception that they 'kind of split and [they] were back together again quite quickly'. Both Stella (whilst recognising 'punishment') and Loz felt 'used' because their substantial efforts in maintaining the relationships had not been met: partners withdrew, and/or [threatened to] take romantic or physical intimacies elsewhere. However, Rachel's experiences, because of her refusal to bow to the behaviours, persisted into post-separation abuse. After the break-up of the relationship, Rachel said Chris would email her with declarations of love - "you're the love of my life and this woman isn't … she's all right" - but would simultaneously put antithetical statements on social media to humiliate her and make her jealous: 'Well, she'd be like "Finally, at last I get to be Mrs. **** Couldn't be happier. How ironic"'.

Not only did the partners use their own physical and romantic intimacies against the participants but also all of the participants were falsely accused by them of infidelity. Stella found it 'quite embarrassing that she 'was accused of 'having an affair' with a female friend who had merely done her a favour. Rachel was similarly accused on the basis of very little: 'I was about 20 minutes late. I told her what had happened and she was insistent actually I was late because I've been sleeping with somebody. I was like, "what the fuck?"'. Loz believed when Jane accused her 'a couple of times' that 'people that accuse you of being unfaithful 9 times out of 10 are the ones that are being unfaithful'.

For Stella and Rachel, the experience was bewildering or embarrassing, whilst Loz experienced it as signifying infidelity in her partner. Whilst Loz might be right in her supposition, accusations of infidelity, taken together with other behaviours, can be seen as an act of control designed to obligate the partner to respond with affirmations of love and loyalty or to somehow work harder at the relationship. It can be seen that infidelity (material, threatened or in the form of accusations) was used against all of the participants to make them work harder and comply with the control of the abusive partner. Infidelity threatened to fracture the illusion of the participants' relationships as conventional to the outside world and is an example of sign-vehicle targeting. Fidelity, or the facsimile of it, was important in preserving their identities and their sense of belonging in the heteronormative worlds they occupied.

4.5(1) Identity abuses: The weaponisation of friends and friendships

Friends and friendships were utilised in a number of emotionally abusive ways. Isolation was a key tactic. Mags would go out with her friends ensuring that Stella realised she was uninvited. Stella recalls her saying "my mates are my mates' erm, and all this sort of stuff. 'My mates don't like it". Stella also articulated that Mags was 'telling Sarah that I'd said things. She was telling me that Sarah had said things and she'd made us enemies'. Rachel referred to Chris's friends often. Chris would isolate Rachel by humiliating her on social media, by putting up 'very nasty remarks… for all her friends and family to see' and humiliate her in the same manner in person. Rachel described situations she faced:

> … she would do it in the pub, she would do it, in the car, she would do it anywhere and it would be really obvious to her friends. She would say something nasty or a really big putdown to you in front of a whole group of people, then there would be silence for a minute and it would be really awkward, then somebody would say something and it would break the ice, and you just be there, kind of, with your head dropped eating your dinner. [Rachel, Lns 852-858]

Rachel found this experience to be humiliating, isolating and felt that the failure of Chris' friends to speak out meant they condoned Chris's behaviour. She articulated that 'it almost made it seem like it was somehow right' and it made her question what Chris's friends' perception of her was; she thought that they believed she 'must have done something that had deserved that'. It is more than concerning that gay friends of perpetrators' were either passively complicit in abuse through denial, albeit sympathetic - 'Her friend gave me a really big warm hug and I knew that she knew'- or,

actively complicit through ignoring physical violence - 'her friends were with us and stuff, they went into the house and I was going through into the porch section of their house and she deliberately got my head like that [demonstrating] and slammed it against the door jamb'. Rachel was unsure if Chris's friends realised what had happened but by this stage in the relationship feared they were.

As recounted earlier, partners being difficult to friends and family can cause isolation for the victim/survivor. Loz experienced similar with her friends on one occasion:

> … At Sue's 40th, her husband chucked me and [Jane] out, and I'm like, 'what the hell is going on?' and apparently, she had been saying stuff accusing Sue's husband of trying to kiss one of the women the works in the hairdressers. So next thing you know I'm getting grabbed by the arm, getting chucked out of the pub… [Loz, Lns 814-818]

The impact of this false allegation outside of the gay world could have far reaching impacts for the victim/survivor, even though on this occasion it was limited to being thrown out of a party. Sue subsequently confided in Loz that Jane had made false allegations of physical violence against her. Sue told Loz 'she said that you beat her up and you would hit her and you'd kick her and you'd bite her'. Loz said she 'couldn't believe it. [She does]n't have a violent bone in [her] body'. She told her mother about the accusations and her mum 'went fucking spare'. Stella also experienced false allegations: Mags had 'a plaster on one arm because she dislocated her thumb on the ski slopes and told everybody [Stella had] thrown her down the stairs'.

During a period of post-separation abuse, Chris sent Rachel's new girlfriend 'a poison pen email… making false allegations that [Rachel] was the one who had beaten her up'. Chris had, within the relationship, attempted to get Rachel herself to believe that she had used physical violence against her. Louise, however, reassured Rachel that this was not the case: 'Louise said "well trust me Rachel, you haven't"'. Chris made other attempts to isolate Rachel from her friends; it is evident that Rachel's friendships were very important to her. Chris utilised entitlement abuse when she attempted to convince Rachel that 'nobody would be okay would be having a girlfriend who had that close a relationship with somebody else'.

Rachel had less contact with her family than either Stella or Loz following the death of her mother and her friends had become like family to her. Chris would try to undermine those strong friendships. Rachel said that Chris 'would say things like "you should hear the things that Kate and Alex say about you when you're not around. They're not your friends really. Louise slags you off. People don't really like you they just put up with you"'. Rachel had a very close friendship with Louise, and Alex was her 'friend of nearly 30 years'. Chris attempted to isolate Rachel from another friend who was from a Muslim background. Her family were far from accepting of her sexuality. Her friend had indeed fled her parent's home because of that. Rachel reported that, 'Chris told her she would tell her family where she was'.

The impacts of isolation and disruption to friendship groups meant that Loz resorted to moving 'to get away from it all'. Stella had already moved to get away from the abuse she was experiencing, so when she tried again with Mags in a new town, she was even more isolated and had to contend with being disbelieved:

> I didn't think anybody would listen because like a lot of abusers are, it only ever happened behind closed doors, so – and, and I've moved from ***** to ******. Technically, I knew literally nobody and there was nobody over here to listen and everybody thought it was me making things up. [Stella, Lns 228-232]

There is nothing more isolating than disbelief. Isolating the participants from their own friendship groups and the perpetrators' friendship groups functioned to isolate them from the gay communities of which they were (trying to be) a part. This form of identity abuse was both direct and indirect. Direct abuse was perpetrated in the form of trying to break apart friendships and stop victims/survivors from forming friendships with others in the community.

False allegations were employed to indirectly break apart friendships, discredit and divert attention from the abuse. Friends might have equally constituted the DVA in the relationships as 'relationship problems' and would be as prone to doing so as the victims/survivors themselves. Alternatively, false allegations may have given rise to perceptions of the relationships as involving situational couple violence or mutual abuse (particularly in the absence of other narratives), thus playing into stereotypes of abuse in same sex relationships. The reality of, and fears of,

disbelief about the abuse were heightened. Furthermore, the participants, who, within their relationship rules denounced physical violence, feared being brought into disrepute by such allegations.

4.5(2) Identity abuses: The weaponisation of family and external heteronormalised worlds

All of the participants were out as gay to their families. Loz was able to tell her mother everything after the conclusion of her relationships. However, her mother, 'couldn't believe it, so that tells you how good she was at convincing my, my family that she was a fucking angel'. Rachel and Stella were in different circumstances and identified a particular threat used against them in relation to their identities. Because neither Rachel nor Stella had told their families about their civil partnerships, new abusive partners threatened to 'out' them as married to their families. Stella clearly understood the nature of the abuse from the way in which she presented it:

> …she did make threats as regards – 'cause I married the first one [yeah] erm, and she did make threats 'cause my mother doesn't know that I'm actually married 'cause I knew she wouldn't accept it. So, she did make threats, yes, to go and sort of out me to my mother [Stella, Lns 139-142]

The notion that someone can be outed as married to parents who are anti-gay marriage, is an interesting twist on what is commonly conceived of as identity abuse, that is, threats to out as gay. Rachel was threatened with this too, she stated that Chris 'would try to throw it at me but it wasn't successful anyway because it didn't really matter'. Rachel wasn't worried

adding, ‘if my mother was alive it might have been a problem’. She said Chris constantly used things ‘she knew would make [her] anxious’ but did not continue with that particular threat ‘because she could see it didn't wind [her] up’. Despite Rachel’s perception that Chris was unsuccessful in using such a threat, after one of the many fractures in the relationship ‘the first thing that [Chris] does on Facebook is invite my father to become her friend and he accepts her friend request, not knowing any better, because I can't really tell him about anything that is going on’. This can be seen to be a veiled threat and an act of intimidation in these circumstances.

Such threats functioned in a very similar way as the threat to out someone in any environment in which they are not able to open about their sexuality. Sexuality was also used against Rachel in relation to being a parent. One of the most sinister acts of post-separation abuse that played into historic stereotypical narratives of homosexuality was perpetrated against Rachel by Chris. Chris had, throughout the relationship, undermined Rachel’s parenting and made threats; she would threaten ‘to call social services about [Rachel’s] son and try to have him taken away from [her]’. Rachel says at times she was so ‘ground down’ she believed that Chris would and could. Rachel recounted that after being split for over 6 months and on the anniversary of her mother’s death, Chris wrote ‘to social services and school and claim[ed] that [Rachel] was sexually abusing [her] son’. This allegation, unsurprisingly, proved to be groundless. Rachel felt duty bound to inform her employers who fortunately were ‘very supportive’ but nevertheless, it

was a 'horrible experience' and telling her employers was 'really embarrassing'. Devastatingly, Rachel revealed her fears and her fears about what might have been the perception of others, when she added to her account 'I am glad [James] was not a girl'.

The multiple experiences and levels of abuse perpetrated against Loz, Rachel and Stella most certainly amounted to intimate terrorism and coercive control. They lived in isolating and isolated worlds wherein it was difficult to recognise and make sense of their circumstances and therefore seek any help or support.

4.6 Help and support

It is evident from within the participants' accounts that self-reliance played a hugely significant role in their journeys. This section seeks to explore their self-reliance and to what extent they had support from others, where support came from and/or to whom they turned for support. Loz and Stella were less likely to seek help as they articulated scripts around privacy: 'I do keep things private' [Stella] and 'I kept it to myself' [Loz]. Although Loz said she tells her parents 'everything', she did not tell them about the violence in the relationship until after it was over. Loz comments: 'I know what my mum's like [laughing] and my mum would probably have went and dealt with her herself and I wasn't having my mum doing that'. Stella felt that she had the support of the police in exiting her first abusive relationship. She also confided in friends from her home town via the

phone. She stated, about leaving her second relationship with Fiona, that she 'did it on [her] own, that one'. She proudly articulated, 'I think I managed it quite well, to be honest'. Stella's perception was that she 'was stronger because of the first instance'.

Rachel did not articulate any need for privacy but said she 'could not have said anything' to her family because she feared she would receive either a homophobic response or be told 'just leave'. Throughout her whole relationship, she turned to her best friend, Louise, for support. Despite hypertensive levels of pressure Chris's attempts did not succeed in isolating Rachel from Louise. Through this resistance Rachel demonstrates aspects of self-reliance.

Not only were the participants self-reliant, but this spilled over into shielding others, both from the knowledge of their circumstances and the potential outcomes of that knowledge. Although Rachel articulated it as weakness, she says that she would not make certain reports about Chris to anyone: 'I felt too scared, what she could do to me and what she could do to my family' and she said, of James, 'I wasn't going to put him through it'. Stella didn't tell her mother about the abuse in her relationship with Mags. She cited family concerns too - 'I know what my mum's like and she just worries that much'. Stella also felt that her mother might blame her, because of her sexuality, for some of the things that had happened.

Stella was able to tell her mother about some of the difficult situations in her second relationship with Fiona, because her mother 'never ever liked her'. Her mother's advice to her was just 'get rid' which at the time Stella perceived to have been motivated by trying to 'get [her] back there with them' which she also perceived to be linked to her sexuality. The level of 'grief' she got from her mother about her relationship with her husband and pressures to come home then were 'none whatsoever, funnily enough [laughter]'. The need for self-reliance was therefore constructed by heteronormative narratives of privacy, and in part, by the people in the lives of the participants and how much they felt they could disclose to them. All of the participants had police involvement in their relationships at some point. All of the reports to the police were because of a level of *outsider involvement*. Loz called the police when at a party (as discussed in section 4.2(1-1)).

Although initially arrested for 'Breach of the peace', Jane was not charged with any offence. *Jane was never formally warned, charged with or prosecuted for any abuse against Loz*. Strangers in a public house called the police for Stella when they saw her being attacked, although Stella states that she 'would have done' once in a position to do so. Stella thinks 'they're quite good on that sort of thing erm, with physical violence'. Stella did not call the police about any other forms of abuse because she saw those acts of abuse as being verbal and 'didn't think they'd do anything about verbal abuse'. Stella feels that the police should only be contacted in

an ‘emergency’ because ‘you don’t want to waste their time’. She had some ongoing police support following the incident with Mags.

The police verbally warned Mags not to go around and returned ‘within minutes’ to warn her off when Stella ‘phoned 999’ because she was ‘hiding behind the cars in the courtyard’. They gave Stella a personal alarm and checked on her daily ‘for weeks’. Stella left behind a significant amount of possessions in Mags’s home, she ‘asked the police if they’d go round with [her] to fetch stuff and they said, ‘No’. …and nobody else would get involved’. Stella could not ‘afford’ to get the possessions back via any other means. *Mags was not charged or prosecuted. She signed a formal warning which meant Stella also could not contact. Stella had to wait 5 years to have their civil partnership dissolved and she forfeited her possessions.* Despite this, Stella thought the service she had received was ‘absolutely brilliant’.

Rachel sought the most help and support of all the participants. After the episode in which she had received a black eye she routinely used helplines for ‘advice’. However, Rachel did not report any of the physical and emotional abuse to the police whilst in the relationship. On one occasion in the relationship she had told Chris she was going to call the police and Chris said they would not ‘believe [Rachel] because [Rachel was] a lot bigger than [her]’. Rachel did, however, call the police about the post-separation abuse she endured when Chris fraudulently reported her to social services

and her son's school. She reported that act (which the police were aware of due to school and social services procedures) and that she was being 'stalked' by Chris, including online stalking and coming 'to the house'.

Rachel says that the police 'paid [Chris] a visit and told her that they might make her sign a harassment notice if she continued with it'. Despite continued online harassment and stalking, *Chris was not charged with anything and neither was she made to sign a harassment notice*. Loz, Rachel and Stella all survived their relationships with the use of very limited amounts of help and support that they felt safe and/or able to utilise. Rachel and Stella used friends to gain informal support, whilst Loz confided in no-one. Rachel was the only one of them that used support services. For all of them, the police were a last recourse and the decision to involve them was all but taken out of their hands indicating the severity of their situations and circumstances.

4.7 Summary

The results and interpretations have provided an explication of experiences of abuse faced by the participants, with a particular focus on identity. Three themes emerged, which were 'identity', 'belonging' and 'power and control'. Identity shaped and was shaped by the participants' (lack of) sense of belonging. This, in turn, contributed to how they experienced and responded to DVA.

All of the participants experienced both physical and emotional forms of abuse. Physical violence was more readily identifiable than other forms of abuse. Through the privileging of physical violence, emotional abuse was rendered intangible and indiscernible and often constituted as 'arguments' which were part of relationships and 'relationship problems'. Emotional abuse was minimised and normalised. Heteronormative understandings of what constitutes DVA functioned to make opaque both emotional abuse and some forms of physical abuse. This operated in a reciprocal relationship with the identities of the participants and their lack of a sense of belonging. The participants brought to the relationships their own relationship rules of 'don't beat, don't cheat' which were the outward expression of their socio-cultural positions. The rules served to both normalize and reinforce the heteronormative characterisation of what constitutes DVA.

The lack of a sense of belonging was etched into the identities of the participants. They sought acceptance from their families and communities and wanted someone to love them, for them. Their identities and their lack of belonging were weaponised against them in both the heterosexually dominated spheres of their lives and within their gay worlds. These vulnerabilities were used against them in both unambiguous and nuanced manners. Their identities and lack of belonging compounded their levels of personal investment in sustaining relationships and left them increasingly vulnerable through the demise of their relationships, which in turn increased their vulnerability of entering and remaining in future abusive

relationships or alternatively, abandoning all prospects of a happy, healthy relationship. Overall, the heteronormative socio-cultural context of the participants was the key facilitative factor in their abuse. Heteronormativity was the wallpaper in all of their worlds and impeded them in recognising, making sense of, and seeking help and support in order to leave their abusive relationships. The next set chapter discusses the results and interpretations in the context of extant literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to answer the question 'How does heteronormativity and assimilation impact on surviving and help-seeking in same sex women's relationships that are characterised by DVA?'. At the end of Chapter 4, I summarised the main results and interpretations and offered some provisional analyses. This chapter seeks to contextualise the results and interpretations within extant literature and broader theoretical analysis. The chapter builds to a presentation of identity abuse and its analysis through intersectionality that is predominantly the original contribution to knowledge offered by this study.

As discussed in the literature review (see section 2.4), there are few sociological studies that focus on DVA and sexuality, and fewer still in the UK context (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2017). The largest published study to date was undertaken by Donovan and Hester, from which multiple papers were produced, culminating in a seminal and canonical text on domestic violence, sexuality and love (Donovan and Hester, 2014). This text developed a number of arguments that has carried the research conversation forward, with Donovan and Barnes now continuing as the main protagonists. This study furthers some of the arguments presented by Donovan and Hester (2014) and extends upon the research. Their project culminated in the re-imagining of the *Duluth Power and Control Wheel* as the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* (Donovan and Hester, 2014) (see section 2.4(2)). This study builds on the *COHSAR Power*

and Control Wheel through an in-depth examination of relationships of the participants in relation to their (re)cognition of DVA within it, their experience of it and ability to act on it. It builds on understandings of identity abuse within same sex women's relationships that feature DVA. For these reasons, their body of work and significant contribution to the field is routinely referred to throughout this chapter.

This study differs methodologically from other studies by bringing to the fore the lived experience of UK based participants who have survived abusive relationships (including my own as participant), in autoethnographic form utilising 'thick description' (as attributed to Geertz, 1973, and as delineated by Denzin, 1989). A similar methodological approach (with a greater leaning towards evocation and different conceptual framework) was employed in the US context by Giorgio (2002) in her research aimed at forwarding practice listening to the silence in definitional dialogues. The research presented here utilises the accounts of the researcher and other women, in an analytic, deep and more traditional ethnographic form, to illuminate and explore the social and cultural challenges faced by women in same sex relationships in recognising, understanding and exiting abusive relationships, and gaining help whilst in the relationship and post separation.

The study presents the emic accounts and perspectives of participants with a shared marginalised social identity utilising standpoint and

intersectionality theory as conceptual framework. The participants' shared intersectional identities include their status as women, their generation, their sexuality and their working-class backgrounds, amongst other intersections. Whilst some of these intersections do not explicitly feature in the accounts of the participants such as generation it is clear they share a socio-historical location being 37, 45, and 53 at the time of interview (see p.??). As such the participants were all born before section 28, for example. By examining the lives of women from similar backgrounds with shared intersectional identities the findings would refute an approach of adding 'sexuality' to 'gender' to 'age' to 'class' but rather incorporates the intersections in line with the approach of Collins (1995; 2019). Instead, the study considers the interconnections between, and, synergistic effects of, structural positions of disadvantage, in line with positions articulated by Crenshaw (1991).

The study examines micro level experiences in the context of macro level social, cultural and political structures. The study presents interpretations rather than empirical findings in a style reminiscent of Collins' (2019) jazz metaphor. The discussion adds to analysis by drawing on literature from many and varied disciplines. Methodologically, it does not pretend to offer the '"truth" of co-formation as an entity [but] more the ways in which co-formation may work' (Collins, 2019, p.243). It illuminates how 'structures of power' have 'produced social locations' for the participants (Collins, 1995, p.491). In doing so, the interpretations do not pathologise the

participants; in line with intersectional approaches the research locates their identities, experiences, relationships and responses within, and as a product of, their socio-cultural and socio-political contexts (Crenshaw, 1991).

The socio-cultural and socio-political contexts of the participants' commonalities in identity, that are both products of heteronormativity and assimilation and yet simultaneously serve to reinforce it, were thematically presented. The interpretation of the stories identified how heteronormativity increased the participants' vulnerability to DVA. The stories and analysis demonstrated the subtlety of identity abuse they experienced which involved macrostructures of heteronormativity being weaponised in micro form, and through structure, against the participants. Such tactics would be less potent without the current levels of assimilation in worlds the participants inhabit.

The language of literature utilised in relation to respondents/participants' sexuality is borrowed throughout the discussion chapter. It should be seen as conveying the specificity of any research discussed and its sample populations, rather than reflecting my position on the fluidity of sexuality and/or gender.

5.2 The participants' contexts

This section links the contexts of the participants that are intersectional and pertinent to this study with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The intersections primarily used in the analysis were sexuality, generation (with the associated social location), and geographical location. Other intersections were present in the accounts but given lesser consideration include gender and gender presentation, social class and motherhood as a gay woman.

The study presented here is one of few UK studies (others include Barnes, 2008; Todd, 2013) solely based on DVA in same sex women's relationships. There are more that consider same sex DVA. Donovan and Hester's (2014) seminal study compared heterosexual DVA with same sex DVA. The fieldwork in that study took place between January 2005 and December 2006 (Donovan and Hester, 2008). The mean age for their female participants was 35.77 years old. It is interesting to note that the mean age of these same participants would now be about 49 years old. The mean age of the participants in this study is 45. As such the participants are arguably of the same cohort. Todd (2013) cites Ryder (1965, p. 851) drawing on the concept of 'cohort as a structural category'. Todd (2013) articulates how Ryder (1965) draws on the arguments of Mannheim (1952 [1927]) in asserting that age, shared historical period and shared socio-cultural location are key in the constitution of a generation. I have drawn

upon this same concept in defining the generation of the participants, with generation playing a central role in the theoretical analysis.

The participants share socio-cultural, socio-historical and socio-legal contexts with each other. This cultural location is discussed in depth in the literature review (see section 2.2). The women in this study grew up absorbing particular denigratory messages about sexuality. For gay women growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, as the participants in this study did, it is clear that homosexuality (as it was legislatively termed, applying to both men and women) was, to understate the case, undesirable. Gay men and women were pathologised as mentally ill and/or regarded as deviant. Within popular culture, for example, in films, homosexuals were the subjects and objects of derision; being portrayed stereotypically or as unstable and anguished, as argued most famously by Russo (1981). *Section 28* merely wrote into legislation the social and cultural view that a gay relationship was a 'pretended family relationship' (GBP, 1988). For lesbian daughters, this was exaggerated by their genders, as they were even less desirable than gay sons (Muller, 1987). Furthermore, the participants do not adhere to stereotypical gender norms which may be considered another vector of oppression (Mackay, 2019).

It is not the intention to empirically 'prove' the impact of these oppressions on the participants. The intent is to view their position through relational thinking through articulation and co-formation (Collins, 2019) drawing

upon their socio-cultural, socio-historical and socio-legal contexts and literature from multifarious disciplines. It is here that I offer an original contribution to knowledge. The lack of social belonging is evident in the accounts of the participants'. This study found that the social, cultural and political subjugation undoubtedly leads to a lack of a sense of belonging experienced by gay people (as also found by Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001).

The period of cultural and social subjugation was followed by a period of rapid change: the declassification of same sex attraction as mental illness (World Health Organization, 1992), changes to the age of consent through the *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 199*4 (GBP, 1994) and *Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000* (GBP, 2000), adoption rights through the *Adoption and Children Act 2002* (GBP, 2002) and legal unions through the *Civil Partnership Act 2004* (GBP, 2004b) and the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013* (GBP, 2013). The backdrop to this, however, remained *Section 28* of the *Local Government Act 1988* (GBP, 1988) was introduced (in 1988) which was not repealed until 2003 (2000 in Scotland).

The dawning of the new era of greater legislative equity, whilst being open to being perceived very positively, for women of my generation created an unstable environment. Our (childhood and early adulthood) normative frameworks, our social, cultural, family identities and social spheres in which we still operate - our '*habitus'* (Bourdieu, 1989; 1990) - was

produced before, in, and by, the late 20th century. Whilst the new socio-legal environment presented many and varied opportunities such as forming a legal union, the cultural and social locations remained unchanged creating a chasm for those whose lives span across the period. An originality of contribution can be found in the presentation of this chasm as material rather than simply ideological. The participants were in civil partnerships. They embraced the new era whilst being bound by the old. Whilst new insights are required into whether such unions obligate partners to behave in heteronormatively gendered institutional manners as Barnes (2013b) suggests, I would argue on the basis of this study that the politics of assimilation and need to belong needs consideration as a part of this.

This study did not aim to capture coming out stories. It is significant that two out of three of the participants did not feel that they could tell their parents they were entering into a civil partnership, despite one describing a particularly close relationship with one of her parents. This is a new type of coming out story; coming out as 'married'. It demonstrates that despite legal changes and assimilated identities the participants experienced a sense of oppression based on their sexuality. They could not freely acknowledge a legal union and were reticent about their sexuality. They feared the consequences of being open. Fitting in was seemingly more important even when fitting in meant fitting in with (perceived) outdated social and legal positions. The other participant displayed reticence about telling her parents she was gay despite being close to both of them and

subsequently receiving a positive reaction. This participant was not only able to, but was encouraged to, enter into a civil partnership. The consequences of this was a profound sense of failure when the relationship ended. This participant was affected by not being able to fit in with her own perception of what it means to be married (see section 4.4(1)).

Two of the participants in this study are parents. It has already been cited that the 1990s was a time when sexuality might strongly influence custody proceedings (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001; Smith, 2006). Although *Re G* (2006) demonstrated that the courts were permitting the reality of lesbian parenting and thereby new understandings of what constitutes 'family' in law, the legacy of prior legislation and cultural norms persists. This is an integral part of the chasm for the participants whose lives span a period of great legislative change. These changes influence decision-making around DVA in their relationships (see section 5.5).

Much of this discussion focuses on the nexus of generation, gender and sexuality of the participants', geographical location will be briefly taken account of here. For the women in this study, living in semi-rural and rural locations at a distance to larger gay communities functioned to worsen their situation. Research on living in a rural community as a gay woman points to being likely to try to remain invisible, being more isolated, fearing homophobia, feeling a lack of privacy and a lack of structural services to meet needs (Bell and Valentine, 1995; McCarthy, 2000). For the gay women

in this study the isolation of living in semi-rural communities was compounded by the isolation of DVA, threats and false allegations (see section 4.5(1)). Such threats and allegations led to fear of community rejection, both from the gay community and local community. This interpretation of the results is discussed further in relation to identity abuse (in section 5.5).

5.3 Recognition of abuse

Multiple studies have found that heteronormativity obscures recognition and consequently action on SSDVA (Ristock, 2002; Irwin, 2006; 2008; Donovan *et al.*, 2006; Barnes, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2008; 2010; 2014; Todd, 2013). The reasons for this are complex and interrelated (see section 2.4(1-1)). All of the participants within this study were subject to physical and emotional abuse that constitutes DVA, but found it hard to identify that they were subject to abuse within their relationships, particularly in the absence of, or use of infrequent, physical violence.

5.3(1) Physical abuse

The notion of the 'public story' of DVA has been taken up in UK academic work pursued by Donovan *et al.*, (2006), Donovan and Hester (2008; 2010; 2014) and Donovan and Barnes (2017) and features in work by Barnes (2013b) and Todd (2013). It describes the social construction of DVA as a heterosexual and gendered problem with a male perpetrator and female victim. It is acknowledged here that heterosexual women are the largest

group affected by the issue of DVA and will likely remain so. However, in line with other studies, this study found the public story played a significant role in obscuring DVA in same sex relationships.

The public story of DVA is a constructed classification. Constructed classifications delineate and shape our understanding of, and consequently responses to, violence (Ristock, 2003). The inability of language used in conjunction with DVA to encapsulate women's experiences of same sex DVA links with notions of mutual abuse (Barnes, 2008). This was demonstrated in one account of a participant in this study. The pattern of asymmetrical abuse that developed might, without nuanced understanding, be construed as mutual abuse or situational couple violence (Johnson, 2008). Attempts to resist in same sex women's relationships are often construed as mutual abuse (Giorgio, 2002; Donovan, Barnes, and Nixon, 2014). An original contribution offered in this study was that perpetrators deliberately uses this construance of mutual abuse (or the potential for it) as a tool of control within their relationships. Furthermore, the public story of DVA means not all forms of physical violence were as identifiable as others.

It is unsurprising therefore that, in keeping with Donovan and Hester (2008; 2010; 2014), it can be suggested that physical forms of violence were privileged over other forms of abuse. This resonates with prior discussions regarding generation. However, it was noted in this study that the participants did not adhere to assigned gender roles in their self-

presentation. Barnes (2008; 2013b) and Donovan and Hester (2011b) articulate that, contrary to preconceived ideas of gender markers being indicative of victim/perpetrator (as in normative heterosexual DVA discourses), there is no evidence of that corollary of 'femme' as victim/survivor or 'butch' as perpetrator in the research hitherto undertaken on same sex women's relationships. This study, like others (examples of which include: Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2006; Donovan *et al.*, 2006; Hassouneh and Glass, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2014), does nonetheless, illuminate the existence of that corollary in the participants' fears of the heteronormatively gendered perceptions of others. The participants also displayed gendered perspectives, indeed, one of the participants in this study stated that her perpetrator was 'like a man' clearly linking violence with masculinity.

Logically, this leads to the position whereby an escalation in physical abuse can occur. Physical abuse rendered other forms of abuse more visible and acted as a catalyst for change for two of the participants in this study, corroborating Donovan and Hester's (2008) finding that escalation can lead to recognition. The lack of physical violence or aggression as a predominant and persistent form of abuse meant that participants remained in relationships until the point of escalation and beyond if the physical violence appeared as 'one-off' incidents.

Donovan and Hester (2008) and Barnes (2008) found that many women only retrospectively recognise abuse after the conclusion of their relationships, which in part, was indicated in this study: like Barnes (2008) participants could identify some abusive experiences contemporaneously and some only retrospectively. This is the likely outcome of privileging of physical forms of abuse as 'what counts'. This presents serious challenges as Donovan *et al.,* (2006), Irwin (2008), St Pierre and Senn (2010) and Donovan and Hester (2010; 2014) all find that emotional abuse is the predominant form of abuse perpetrated by women. [This applies to both same sex and heterosexual relationships in Donovan and Hester's (2014) research].

5.3(2) Emotional abuse

Not only is emotional abuse the most often utilised form of abuse in same sex relationships between women, but Donovan and Hester (2014, p.162) in their comparative research found women in same sex relationships experienced emotional abuse 'most persistently'. This corresponds with their statistically significant findings that female perpetrators are more emotionally violent and emotionally coercive. This was a finding of this study also. Various forms of emotional abuse were shrouded by a lexicon that minimises and diminishes their impact; the terms 'verbal abuse' and 'moods' were routinely used in the accounts of the participants.

Barnes (2008) identified the use of terms such as 'verbal abuse' and 'emotional abuse' in the accounts of her participants, but alternatively suggests that the increase use of terms like 'verbal' and 'emotional abuse' in the media and awareness campaigns can confuse, leading to perceiving of unpleasant situations as abuse. Barnes (2008) also identified the difficulties that some of her participants had in determining if the relationships were abusive or not, since one-off incidents of name- calling, for example, whilst unpleasant, are not indicative of a pattern of coercive control, but participants perceived themselves to have been subject to abuse.

Irwin (2008) states that emotional abuse is the most difficult form of abuse to identify. This argument lends weight to this study and studies by Donovan *et al.* (2006), Irwin (2006), Donovan and Hester (2014, p.185) in articulating that emotional abuse in same sex relationships is often reframed as 'relationship problems'. Donovan and Hester (2014) cite this as uniquely applied to same sex relationships. The analysis in this study corroborates this; all of the participants interpreted the DVA they experienced as being part of the problems in the relationship. This affected their ability to make sense of the abuse they experienced. This was tied up with notions of love and romance, as is a key theme in Donovan *et al.* (2006) and Donovan and Hester (2011a; 2014). Whilst the importance of this theme is acknowledged, it is not explicitly explored here with focus

instead being given to the other (relational) aspects of the social and cultural paradigm of the participants that were facilitative in their abuse.

5.4 Identity

Much of originality of this study comes from the focus on the identity of the participants and how this effected their experience of DVA. This was done from an intersectional perspective that paid attention to how they were products of their generation. The participants were all children of parents who had been married for decades. This shaped their identities and understandings of how relationships work. Moreover, as young adults in the 1990s, they experienced a raft of social and legal changes regarding relationships, as already discussed. The 1990s was a time of great optimism for gay people. Many gay people talked of creating relationship norms that were democratic and outside of heterosexual norms (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). The concept of sexual citizenship was new and burgeoning (Weeks, 1998).

Giddens (1992) suggests that transformation was taking place in the area of personal intimacy. He suggests that women particularly were seeking confluent love as opposed to romantic love. Confluent love, Giddens (1992) argues, is jointly aspirational, about the sharing of emotional needs and love. It is about having individual and personal needs met. Egalitarianism is a strong theme found in canonical literature on same sex relationships in this period. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan's (2001, p.7) book was

'concerned above all with agency, creativity and self activity of non-heterosexuals who are constructing ways of life valid to them in circumstances often not of their own making'. However, there were other dynamics identifiable. Heaphy, Donovan and Weeks (1999) gave voice to some of the problems of power differentials in relationships, despite optimism that these differentials could and would be resolved.

The participants in this study appeared to aspire to this model, as evidenced by their conviction to meet their partners' needs, often at the expense of their own. Jamieson (1998) critiques Giddens (1992) for a variety of reasons, including material limits to egalitarianism, for example, the care of children as a gendered concern. The material limits of egalitarianism in the participants' relationships was expressed in this study. It can be seen that participants were engaged in emotionally taking care of the relationship, and trying harder to make the relationship work (fulfilling stereotypically female roles). Ironically, they were at times fulfilling stereotypically male roles too, such as financially supporting the family unit and undertaking household maintenance. Retrospectively, we are able to see this through the lens of sexual citizenship. As identified in the literature review, Duggan (2002) positioned the aspirational desire for equality as the 'new homonormativity'. She unequivocally linked 'homonormativity' and equality with neoliberalism, arguing that the gay movement had become mainstream and consumerist, leaving only residual queer theory, which

was made up of convoluted abstract theorisations and small pockets of localised and isolated activism.

The participants were growing up and coming of age in the 1990s. Their generation shaped their expectations of relationships and how they should operate within them. For them as young adults in semi-rural communities who had grown up against the backdrop of loathing, derision, pathologisation and exclusion, going home to mum and dad and telling them that acceptance from them was not required, because it was all too neoliberal and heteronormative, was probably not a realistic possibility for many. The lack of a sense of belonging makes this equally unlikely. The material conditions of life simply shoehorned many into assimilation and the level of agency once seemingly possible, in the preface of Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001), appears a fleeting mirage. It could be suggested that this is one reason for the quiet sense of discomfort participants exhibited in using the term 'wife' to refer to a legal female partner; another related reason might be, that linguistically, within conventional Western dichotomous thinking, it positions them as 'husband'.

This study has brought to the surface the participants' relationships rules of 'don't beat; don't cheat'. Donovan and Hester (2014) used the concept of relationship rules which were the rules of the abusive partner but this study found that the participants also had relationship rules that they brought to the relationship. Parents of the participants (who all remained

married until death or, in one case, are still married) entered into marriages before the *Divorce Reform Act 1969* (GBP, 1969) (enacted in 1971) and *Matrimonial Causes Act 1973* (GBP, 1973). The participants' relationship rules metaphorically perform an abridged ostinato of the divorce laws pertaining to marriages of this historical period.

In other words, the historical location, generation and family relationships served to keep the participants in abusive relationships for longer. This is unique contribution to the field of knowledge. Previously this situation was mainly found to be the case in heterosexual marriages (Donovan and Hester, 2014). Up until 1969 the grounds for divorce were adultery, cruelty, desertion and incurable insanity. Even following 1971, when irretrievable breakdown became a basis for divorce, it had to be proven on the basis of one of five 'facts'; adultery, unreasonable behaviour, desertion, or separation for 2 years with consent (or 5 years without).

Donovan and Hester (2014, p.205) articulated two relationship rules at the centre of their *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel*. These rules are that the 'relationship is for the abusive partner and on their terms' and that the 'survivor is responsible for care of the abusive partner and relationship'. When Donovan and Hester's (2014) relationship rules are coupled with the participants' relationship rules, another symbiotic relationship is formed. This interpretation is an original offering. From this position, it is possible to argue that, the social and cultural environment, (that negates emotional

abuse), when twinned with the participants' generational heteronormative perspectives, left the participants vulnerable to remaining in abusive relationships for longer than they otherwise might albeit that their own rules eventually assisted them in leaving. Donovan and Hester (2014) suggest that heterosexual women are more likely to remain in abusive marriages because of ideological values (both their own and their families), but this study suggests that this may well be the position for many older gay women also, as a result of their collective intersectional identity, as opposed to simply an individualised response. The assimilationist identity, in part produced by the intersectional identity, can then be used against the victim/survivor as a weapon giving rise to different and nuanced forms of identity abuse.

5.5 Identity abuse

The contributions to knowledge that this study offers lies mainly in the area of identity abuse. Typically, identity abuse is perceived of as being about the destabilisation of the self of the victim/survivor by some means. In that context it might be conceived of, as being exemplified by threats to out someone (in some or all spheres of their life), define how someone should look, undermine their sense of self et cetera. Donovan and Hester (2014, p.204) state that identity abuse might encompass the use of 'stereotyping and assumptions …to further undermine, threaten, isolate or punish a partner'. This study builds on this notion and furthers it, by offering an in-depth analysis in relation to a cohort of gay women to demonstrate the

systematic operation of the use of identity as a weapon against victim/survivors in the differing spheres of their lives.

The tactics being utilised in general depend on the framework of heteronormativity to give credence and willing audiences. Donovan and Hester (2014, p.67) argue that the central issue of concern regarding assimilation is that it requires the marginalised individual to aspire to the hegemonic norms: these become the 'gold standard' by which anything else is judged. Not only does this serve to reinforce the aforementioned norms, but anything else, by definition, becomes abnormal. A theme that emerges throughout Donovan and Hester's (2014, p.70) study, is that of 'sameness'; they posit that there has been a shift in the expressed views and attitudes of the LGBTQ communities than had been found merely a decade before (and as were reported in Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001)).

The politics of sameness led their respondents, for example, to indicate that they feel that abuse in heterosexual relationships is the same as abuse in same sex relationships. Arguably then, the assimilationist politics of the participants' in this study are, in part, also product of (current) wider cultural and social positions. Assimilation can be seen in the lives of the participants through their desire to be in civil partnerships, even where this overrode parental disapproval. They expressed concerns about being tarnished in relation to their intimate and romantic relationships; about

false allegations of unfaithfulness and/or abuse. They were further concerned with how they might be perceived by the community.

Gay women, due to the wider assimilationist politics, risk being marginalised both within and without their own communities if they tarnish the perpetuated image of the community. Donovan and Hester (2014) argue that this could lead to victim/survivors concealing abuse. The descriptions given by the participants in this study would indicate that this is the case; participants demonstrated that they gave partial, and/or mediated, accounts of abuse or concealed it when possible. For the women in this study, being part of a failing relationship might also act to bring the gay community into disrepute, when set against their identity and the politics of assimilation.

We can compare this with Hester's (2011, p.839) 'systematic contradictions' between agencies engaging in domestic violence work, child protection work and child contact work. The same argument can be made involving different spheres; intimate relationships, friendships and the community, family, and the heteronormalised world beyond this of employment, social and formal structures. Hester draws on Bourdieu's (1989) concept of '*habitus*'. The participants must cede to assimilation in order to participate in social and cultural life (Chomsky, 2017). The loci of the participants' is key in understanding the (indirect and direct) identity abuses that they experienced. Three different spheres were identified in

the results and interpretations. These were: physical and romantic intimacies, friends and friendships (community) and family and external heteronormative worlds. Each of the spheres offers differing promises and brought differing expectations and threats.

Utilising the research of Guadalupe-Diaz and Anthony (2017), it can be seen how identity abuse was perpetrated through altercasting and sign vehicle targeting. The possibilities of these types of abuse are seemingly endless since exposure to them preys on the individual vulnerabilities of the victim/survivor. However, this study found that these vulnerabilities can be systematically examined through intersectional analysis. The tactics of identity abuse by the perpetrators in this study show or indicate movement beyond exposure of sexuality to (potential) exposure of (alleged) non-conformity with being a good sexual citizen. This involves conformity with neoliberalism and heteropatriarchal gender and sexuality norms.

Guadalupe-Diaz and Anthony (2017, p.6) argued that in discrediting identity the abuse worked through 'redefining the situation to focus on participant-defined insecurities'. This study demonstrated that when viewed through an intersectional lens, this can be translated into redefining the situation by the participants' defined vectors of oppression, that is, their intersectional identity. The associated sign vehicles are anything that signifies their conformity with their assimilated identity. This may for

example be a wedding ring, the relationship itself, a job role or role as a mother.

Exploring this further in the context of this study means that the locus of physical and romantic intimacies offered the promise of a loving and fulfilling relationship, with the expectation of loyalty and fidelity, along with threats of infidelity, jealousy and false allegations. This is the locus in which the abuser is situated with the victim/survivor. Within this locus, the perpetrator is able to use intimate relationships to engage in abusive behaviours in order to coercively control the victim/survivor. This might be through the withdrawal (or forcing of) a sexual relationship. It may alternatively be through the use of infidelity: either as a false accusation of; threats of; the pretence of; or actual infidelity. This can make the victim/survivor work harder at the relationship or cause conflicts (which often lead to the perception of mutual abuse).

Donovan and Hester (2014) examine discourses of love in particular and found them to be fundamental and shaping in recognising and responding to DVA in same sex relationships, however love is not the focus of this study. Whilst discourses of love are acknowledged in this study and indeed, the participants stated that they loved their partner, focus is given to other aspects of participant experience. An analysis could undoubtedly be made around discourses of love but this study provides a different 'provisional analyses that can be perpetually recast' (Collins, 2019, p.234). Equally,

there are other types of abuse that could have been focused on such as financial abuse and these were not the focus of this work. It would be possible to re-analyse the data in a number of ways. The approach taken here is dialogical rather than attempting to 'prove' the 'truth' of any one perspective.

Within this study, sense of self has been articulated as 'the known self' borrowing the language of *Johari Window* (Luft and Ingham, 1955) to encapsulate the sense of private and public selves (see section 3.5(5)). It links 'the self' to what is 'known of the self by others'. It incorporates self-presentation in private spheres and self-presentation in the roles that one might have in one's life which are both personal and public, such as mother, daughter, informal carer (to a vulnerable adult), friend, community member et cetera.

A perpetrator may undermine the personal sense of self, for example, through controlling the look of victim/survivor (for example, how hair is worn, clothes, et cetera). A perpetrator may use the public 'known self' to discredit or cause problems for the victim/survivor via any number of means related to identity. Examples would include outing, 'outing as married', publicly calling into question fidelity, employment of stereotypes to call into question the victim/survivor's parenting, false accusations of abuse et cetera. This too can make the victim/survivor work harder at the relationship or cause conflicts which again can lead to the perception of

mutual abuse). This was evident throughout the accounts of the participants. Participants experienced abuse that touched on every sphere of their life; from new relationships to children, from friendships to families of origin, from employment through to involvement with social services and the police.

The locus of friends and friendships (community) brought the promise of camaraderie, acceptance and inclusion. For the participants, friendships were a source of consternation. Participants recounted attempts to isolate them from their existing friendships and their partner's friends and thereby, the wider gay community. Abusive partners attempted to disrupt friendships through false allegations of infidelity with people who were just friends (utilising heteronormative constructs) and by making false allegations of abuse. The use of false allegations was pronounced in this locus. Giorgio (2002) identified the use of false allegations in the accounts of her participants. Giorgio (2002) talks about allegations of abuse made by the perpetrator to the victim, causing self-doubt, guilt and shame, and (threats of) allegations to others.

Giorgio (2002) links the ability to do this to the lack of a gender marker thereby locating the issue squarely within heteronormative constructions of DVA. She articulates that responses to such allegations either position responsibility with the victim for the abuse or produces a perception of the relationship as being mutually abusive. This can be the case even when

confiding in friends. Within this research there were examples of categories of 'audience responses' as articulated by Donovan and Hester (2014, pp. 179-183) in a typology. Audiences within this research offered 'narratives of rejection', this includes disbelief and/or deservedness of abuse, others were 'willing but unhelpful audiences', whilst others still were 'willing and helpful audiences'. Narratives from the victim/survivor might be partial, edited or minimised as they tested the reception.

The locus of family and external heteronormalised worlds was the external sphere in which identity abuse could be most easily and effectively perpetrated. For participants in this study, it was the point of heightened concealment for a variety of reasons: fear of homophobic responses and disbelief; fear of being perceived as the abuser; fear of failure (and calling into question the validity of the assimilationist project of equal rights); self-reliance and the protection of families of origin; fear of impacts on employment; and fear of having your child removed from your care. Fear of having your child removed links with generational identity and the historical legal and material conditions faced by gay women, as discussed previously. Hardesty *et al*. (2008) found that the intersection of sexuality and motherhood corresponded with a fear that children would be removed because of violence augmented by sexuality despite the outness of the mother. They also feared the encroachment of families of origin and legal and social services. Children also added to the perceived need to make the relationships work and mothers tried harder.

Using the mothers Hester (2011, p.850) wrote about as metaphor the participants faced 'impossible choices' through the conjunctions of abuse and fears driven by historical material circumstances and the heteronormative constructions of DVA and resulting processes endemic in social services, law, and their families of origins. Hardesty *et al.* (2008, p.195) stated that of the unemployed mothers, half had lost their jobs for 'reasons related to IPV'. Whilst participants in this study did not lose their jobs due to DVA, there were employment impacts; one participant lost time out of work due to the destruction of a vehicle and another participant had to provide explanations in a work role over the assessment of her child by social services.

These social realities give rise to further reasons to remain silent and work harder at the relationship. The locus of family and external heteronormative worlds brought with it the promise of acceptance and inclusion but the threat of unmitigated isolation, formal and legal consequences and the shattering of external worlds essential to the participants' wellbeing and existence. Taken together as a whole, it is unclear why being in this position would lead to anything other than the foreclosure of help-seeking. Whilst these outcomes are broadly similar for anyone experiencing DVA and anyone can experience identity abuse, the conjuncture of sexuality defined and broadened the tactics used in the identity abuse.

5.6 Help and support

This study found, commensurate with others (Ristock, 2002; Irwin, 2006; St Pierre and Senn, 2010; McDonald, 2012; Barnes, 2013a; Donovan and Hester, 2011; 2014), that survivors rarely seek help from formal agencies such as the police or specialist domestic violence services. The aforementioned studies related this to fearing disbelief, that experiences would be minimised and homophobia from the police and agency practitioners. These studies illuminate the heteronormative constructs pervading to varying degrees and link these with the recognition of DVA and being able to make sense of it. Whilst these findings illuminate what is undoubtedly the case, this study found themes around self-reliance pervading the accounts. This is a theme previously illuminated by Donovan and Hester (2014).

Donovan and Hester (2014) link self-reliance to neoliberalism and, in turn, to the sense of shame experienced by their respondents. They further link this to the identity of their LGBTQ respondents and the impact of the public story of DVA impacting upon victim/survivor's ability to make sense of their abuse. Whilst Donovan and Hester (2014) state that most of their respondents sought help of some sort (mostly from friends), the most recent research available (Barnes and Donovan, 2016) articulates that most respondents had not reported their experience to anybody. This is the case in two out of three of the participants' accounts in this study. There could be a number of reasons for the change in reporting between Donovan and

Hester (2014) and Barnes and Donovan (2018), for example, relating to the different population potentially brought about by slight changes to the sampling strategy, that is, the use of social media (the methodology utilised was the same).

It is possible, however, to argue that it represents a shift in how respondents deal with DVA (including an increasing sense of shame) in keeping with the furthering of neoliberalist politics and policies in the UK. Self-reliance within this study had further morphed into the need to protect families of origin from being worried or discredited. It is notable that the concept of resilience is emerging more widely in popular culture. This is a concerning furtherance of self-reliance which makes clear that responsibility lies with the victim/survivor and failure to survive is about a lack of personal resilience; not social and structural inequalities and oppression.

Barnes and Donovan (2018) articulate that the top three reasons articulated for not seeking help were privacy, shame and/or that the abuse was not severe enough, which they link to Donovan and Hester's (2014) notion of the public story of DVA. Assimilationist politics mean that DVA for gay women is simultaneously cast as the same as the heterosexual experience of DVA, but *not the same,* because it is less serious. This was strongly suggested in the accounts of participants' in this study as the police were involved in all of cases but limited or no action resulted. One

participant stated that the police should only be called in an emergency. Again, this is in keeping with the findings of Westmarland, Johnson and McGlynn (2018), who cite an over-representation of out of court resolution in cases involving same sex DVA.

It is concerning that victim/survivors are now most often telling no-one about their abuse (Barnes and Donovan, 2016), despite friends still being the most routine source of help for gay people when help is sought (Irwin, 2006; 2008; Donovan *et al.*, 2006; Donovan and Hester, 2008; 2014). This underlines the powerful nature of the heteronormative construction of DVA alongside neoliberalism and the associated politics of assimilation. It can be articulated, even more fervently, that the politics of sameness have not led to increased agency as seemed possible before social cultural assimilation, as in Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001). Indeed, Donovan and Barnes (2017) have problematised the notion of sameness and called for more nuanced understandings of 'sameness' and 'difference' both across and within sexualities and genders. It is here that this study situates itself.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has synthesised the results and interpretations produced by the autoethnographic and emic perspectives of the participants with extant empirical literature and broader theoretical perspectives. It has utilised a standpoint and intersectional conceptual framework as the basis of the

synthesis and in-depth analysis of three lesbians' accounts of domestic violence and abuse. It has considered the historical, material and socio-cultural situations of the participants giving specific focus to the identity of the participants. From this position it has unpacked identity abuse and explored the connections between the socio-cultural and historical positioning of participants and their assumptions and expectations of relationships between women. It has considered how they made sense of violence and abusive behaviours and their response to it. It locates neoliberal assimilationist politics, including heteronormativity and heteronormative constructions of DVA, within the experiences of the participants in this study.

This has enabled a systematic understanding of identity abuse and linked socio-cultural structural forms of inequality and oppression to individual accounts of behaviours, and patterns of behaviours, that characterise DVA directed at people with intersectional identities. The participants in this study attempted to normalise the abuse they experienced through assimilation.

In the final chapter a new model drawn from this study is presented as a heuristic device and contribution to health and well-being practice (see sections 3.5(5) and 6.5(2)) for understanding behaviours as identity abuse and as part of a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviours. Whilst it is not usual to present something 'new' in a concluding chapter, in this type

of study ‘theory is never finished, but [reaches] a provisional pause or stopping point within an ongoing loop of experimental inquiry’ (Collins, 2019, p.148). The following chapter will also consolidate the contributions to knowledge made by this study, discuss the limitations of the research and make recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a summing up of the research undertaken. An overview of the study will be provided which will offer the conclusions drawn. This chapter will add further depth to the contributions to academic and professional knowledge made. There will also be recommendations for future research and practice. The chapter also contains some reflection on the study and finally, an epilogue is presented to conclude participants' stories.

6.2 Overview of the research study

The research question this study set out to answer was: 'How does heteronormativity and assimilation impact on surviving and help-seeking in same sex women's relationships characterised by DVA?' In answer to that question an analysis of heteronormativity and its impact on DVA was presented through an analytic autoethnographical approach. The approach utilised the emic perspectives of three women (one being my own) to locate the experiences of surviving, seeking help from within, and exiting relationships, characterised by DVA in socio-cultural and structural forms of inequality and oppression. The study was inductive and took an interpretive grounded style approach to the analysis of data. Data was collected through in-depth dyadic interviews with three participants, who self-identified as experiencing DVA, and were recruited through an online community group. Data coding was informed by the C*OHSAR Power and Control Wheel* (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Three themes emerged, which were 'identity', 'belonging' and 'power and control'. Intersectionality and standpoint theory were used to form the conceptual framework underpinning the study in which the lived experiences were critically analysed against the backdrop of the wider socio-cultural, historical and legislative in the UK context. Data was presented in a narrative ethnographic thematic form. The study enabled the development of a model based on the weaponisation of identity as a facet of DVA in same sex women relationships.

6.3 Limitations of this study

There are a number of limitations of this research that can be identified, notwithstanding a further number of methodological limitations (that were discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3). Its primary limitation as analytic autoethnography is in utilising a third person account of the author. Criteria as enunciated by Anderson (2006) was drawn on, these being: complete member researcher status; analytic reflexivity; narrative visibility of the researcher's self; dialogue with informants beyond the self; and lastly, commitment to theoretical analysis. It differs from evocative autoethnography by giving prominence to analytic reflexivity by drawing on theory to present analysis of my own and others' insider perspectives. Whilst it could be argued that the 'narrative visibility of the researcher's self' is diminished in this study, it was considered more crucial to be ethical than to adhere strictly to criteria. Ellis (2001, p.615) postulates that, 'you have to live the experience of doing the research…, think it through,

improvise… anticipate and feel its consequences'. Such improvisation was made firstly, by writing in the third person. To write in third person may be seen to distance the author too much from the position of 'complete member researcher status', therefore, the second compensatory improvisation was to adopt a full researcher/participant status by subjecting myself to the same 'scrutiny' as the subjects of the enquiry, as favourably endorsed by Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013). Anderson and Glass-Coffin cite feminist methodologists (Fonow and Cook, 1991; Naples, 2003; DeVault and McCoy, 2006) in arguing that not only does this put the researcher on the same 'critical plane' as participants, it enables the retrospective examination of the researcher's own cultural assumptions.

This study was on a very small scale involving only three participants. This is common in autoethnographies (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998). It was not deemed appropriate to use Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria of credibility, dependability and trustworthiness due to the question of researcher bias, which is a necessary part of autoethnography. Catalytic authenticity (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) was the goal of the research, but this is limited due to the scholastic purpose of the study: It is not possible to engage in joint constructions of the interpretations or to focus on participant growth. Indeed, the scholastic presentation of this academic study would likely impact on its accessibility to the community and limit, therefore, its potential for direct community use. However, the objective of dissemination and practical application is fully embraced. Practical

application is demonstrated through the creation of a model that can be used in relation to any intersectional identity not just those written about here in. Cramer and Plummer (2009) suggest that through examining how help-seeking is constructed through social locations service could better attend to need. Furthermore, there is intention for dissemination through publication and the model will be taught alongside the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* to undergraduate students.

The study is further limited by the purposive convenience sampling strategy that was employed. Additionally, participants self-identified as having experienced DVA, thus demonstrating some level of retrospective cognition and resulting in the situation where all three participants had experienced physical violence in relationships, although this was not a pre-requisite for involvement. The use of interactive interviews as a method could be argued to have shaped responses despite the employment of an unstructured approach. As with all interview-based studies, memory was the key resource for the participants, however, the accounts of experiences were not taken to be absolute truths, rather perspectives and stories that have been constructed, integrated and assimilated within the participants' own sense of self and life story. This is in keeping with the standpoint and intersectional frameworks utilised. It can also be suggested that there are more interpretations of the data available than have been articulated here. This is most certainly the case and whilst there was a simple triangulation of the results and interpretations, through the use of three participants,

there was no theoretical or methodological triangulation as there is no intent to claim validity or generalisability.

There are absences from this analysis that would have been possible even from within the confines as above. The study lacks full consideration of gender and patriarchy. It is clear that gender that could have been much more fully considered as an intersection. There was limited discussion of gender through discussion of butch/femme roles and gender markers, but 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and gendered identities and its impact on the heteronormative construction of DVA was not fully considered here. Again, this relates to the limit of scholastic endeavour here which predominately focused on sexuality. Furthermore, little attention was paid to the way in which gender and sexuality is now widely conceived of as more fluid than this study suggests. This can be linked to the cohort approach taken by the study.

It could certainly be argued that within this study there is only a representation of white, able-bodied women who identify as gay and, as such, it does not fill gaps in the literature that exist in relation to the experience of other sections of the community. It would most certainly lack authenticity for me as a white, able-bodied, gay researcher to attempt to do this from within the selected methodology. As such the intersections that have been given focus are those of sexuality and generation, with the

expressed hope that the intersectional model offered has potential for practitioners to more widely embrace whomever they encounter that may need support or help beginning with the standpoint of the victim/survivor's intersectional identity.

In summary, whilst the study explores the impacts of heteronormativity and assimilation on surviving and help-seeking in same sex women's relationships characterised by DVA, not everything that could be said, has been said. This is primarily for three reasons. One, the research conducted is small scale and does not pertain to be transferable. Two, there is no intention to grant this small group of 'knowers' epistemic privilege over others. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, because power relations are fluid (Collins and Bilge, 2016).

6.4 Conclusions reached by the study

This study found in keeping with others that heteronormativity obscures the recognition of DVA in same sex relationships between women (Ristock, 2002; Irwin, 2006; 2008; Donovan *et al.*, 2006; Barnes, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2008; 2010; 2014; Todd, 2013). Moreover, my study has found that the participants' heteronormative socio-cultural context was the key facilitative factor in their abuse. Emotional abuse was often re-framed as relationship problems and/or conflict in parity with Donovan and Hester (2014). Heteronormative understandings of what constitutes DVA obscured

recognition of emotional abuse and some forms of physical abuse which again confirms Donovan and Hester's (2014) analysis. My study demonstrates how this obfuscation functioned in a reciprocal relationship with the participants' identities and their lack of a sense of belonging which in turn can be linked to their sexuality.

Civil partnership and same sex marriage added a perceived level of obligation to victim/survivors even when they were not in a legal union. This can be related to discourses of love (Donovan and Hester, 2014) and heteronormative assimilation. My research found that heteronormativity compounded the fear of failure of the relationship, especially where there was a history of relationship failure. The participants themselves, in my research, were found to bring their own rules to relationships that appeared to have developed out of historic heterosexual relationship norms. I argued, in Chapter 5, that assimilation has meant that ideological norms that Donovan and Hester (2014) noted heterosexual women bring to their marriages are now evident in same sex relationships between women.

Increasing legislative rights and freedoms appear, for those involved in my research, to have led to a wider perception of the need to live by normative standards that are indebted to both neoliberalism and heteronormativity. Assimilation played a key role in how participants partook in their relationships and social world in the here and now; yet they simultaneously

responded to a 'yesterworld' that had shaped their social world and identities prior to legislative changes and a notionally wider level of social acceptability. I have argued that this created a generational chasm. Participants' identities were weaponised against them using heteronormativity often in conjunction with that generational chasm. This often left them with impossible choices, for example, negotiating how one might behave in accordance with the norms of a married partner (in heterosexual terms) whilst also being silent about a same sex relationship.

My research found that perceived adherence with heteronormative values created opportunities and sites for abusive partners to perpetrate abuse on the basis of identity which furthers analysis made by Donovan and Hester (2014) through the identification of areas of vulnerability. These were identified in relation to friendships and the community, family relationships and public social worlds (involving fears around employment and children). The impact of this in relation to DVA was shame, silencing, minimisation, trivialisation and remaining in, or resuming, relationships in which DVA was present. Irwin (2006; 2008), Donovan *et al.*, (2006), Donovan and Hester (2008; 2014) found that friends were the most utilised source of help but Barnes and Donovan (2018) found that victim/survivors are now most often not confiding in anyone about abuse. Donovan and Hester (2014) suggest a growing trend of self-reliance and link this to neoliberalism. This analysis resonates with the results of my research. The lack of help-seeking, help-

seeking in emergencies and poor responses from structural services were the result of heteronormativity, neoliberalism and assimilation.

In short, whilst equal legislation exists, brought about through equality campaigning there have been unintended outcomes for women experiencing SSDVA. Equality through assimilation has instead brought about a curtailed ability to recognise, name or voice the experience of DVA, and given rise to abuse tactics that harness fears based on not being perceived to be 'gold standard' in any sphere of your life.

6.5 Original contributions

This section is explored in two areas: *Academic and professional knowledge* and *Practice*.

6.5(1) Original contributions to academic and professional knowledge

The study presented here has made a number of contributions to academic and professional knowledge. It contributes to the growing body of sociological literature in the in the UK. The study has contributed to knowledge by utilising, in its coding strategy, the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* (Donovan and Hester, 2014). The use of this model brought a systemic approach to the coding of power and control in a same sex relationship. The 'indicative behaviours' (Donovan and Hester, 2014,

p.208) were formational in translating the experience of participants and understanding them in the context of DVA. In addition, Donovan and Hester's (2014) two rules were paralleled against the participants' rules and a new theoretical conceptualisation emerged regarding reciprocity. This deepened the understanding of the impact of heteronormativity.

The analytic autoethnographic interpretive grounded approach taken brought new evidence from insider positions to both previously researched terrains and newer terrains, that is, the experience of DVA and help-seeking and the experiences in the context of post civil-partnership (same sex marriage) in the UK. The use of a standpoint and intersectional approach (which was adopted by Donovan and Hester, 2014) was crucial in this exploration which involved an ontologically relativist position as outlined in the methodology (Chapter 3). The analytical ethnographic approach arose from the need to interrogate the systemic heteronormativity that was identified as present in the extant literature and in the participants' accounts of their experiences.

The study differs from other research through the presentation of emic accounts and perspectives of participants who share a marginalised social identity. Their standpoint was the basis for analysis with specific focus on their intersectional identities. The study, whilst recognising the individuality of experience, explored aspects of the participants' shared intersections of

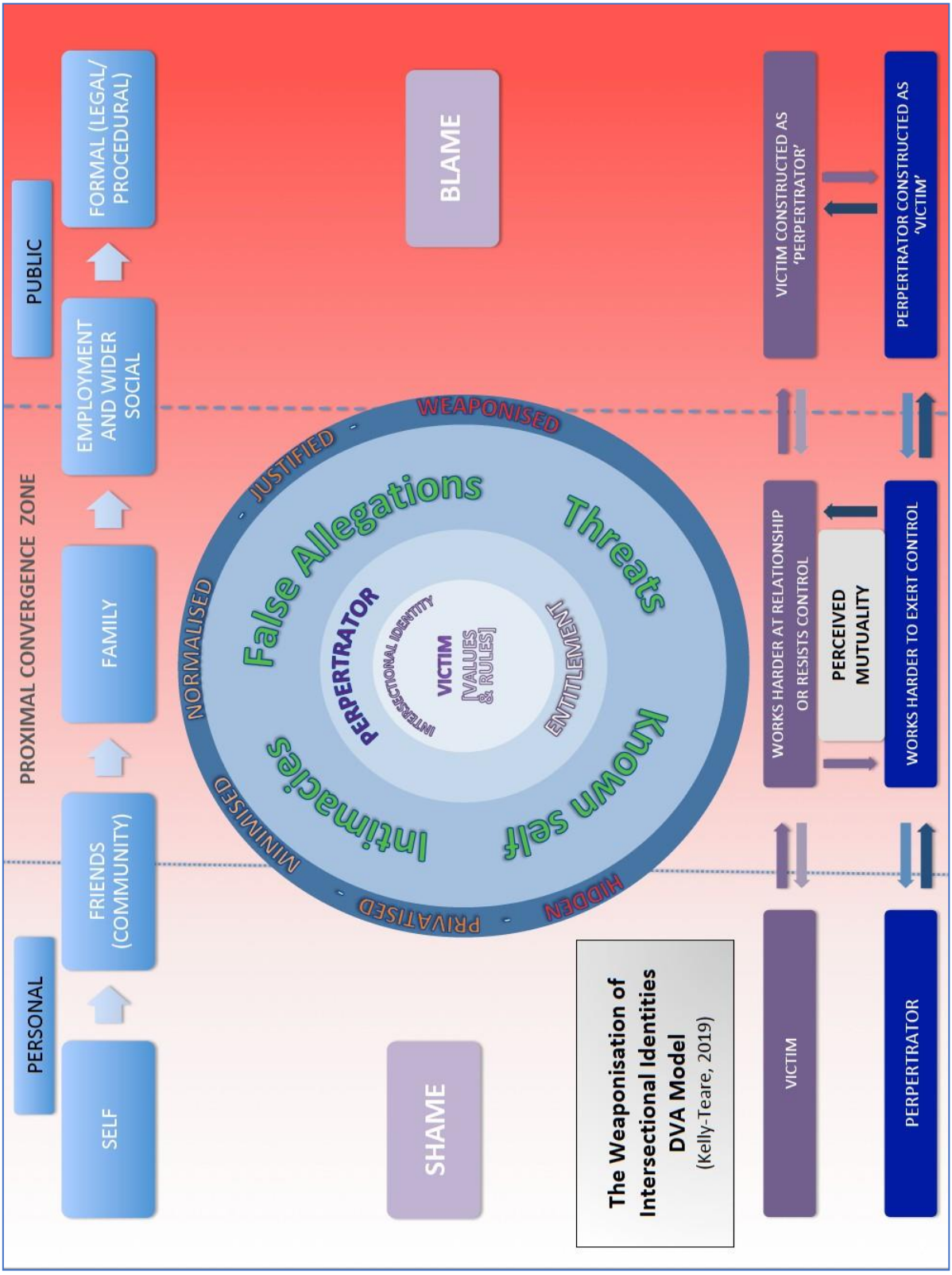
generation, sexuality, gender and semi-rural location drawing upon McCall's (2005) intra- and inter- categorical approach. This position enabled the examination of micro level experiences in the context of macro level social, cultural and political structures. Moreover, it examined the production of social location through the structure of power (Collins, 1995). The participants' identities, relationships and experiences of surviving relationships characterised by DVA were located as products of their socio-cultural and socio-political contexts. One key aspect of this was the shared historical location of the participants, drawing upon the work of Todd (2013).

In analysis, arguments were presented and re-articulated drawing on my research and Donovan and Hester's (2014) regarding assimilation. Barnes (2013b) insights on heteronormative language were drawn upon in addition to the study being supported by foundation research of various prior studies (Giorgio, 2002; Irwin, 2006; 2008; Barnes, 2008; McDonald, 2012). My study found that assimilation is crucial to newly forming abusive behaviours based on identity. This study differs also from other studies through its focus on abusive behaviours involving identity (on the basis of sexual minority status). Heteronormativity serves to valorise the way in which identities are performed in differing spheres of life. Any aspect of an individual or their life that could be seen to deviate from heteronormative expectations was a potential site of identity abuse. For victim/survivors who do not conform to stereotypical gender norms this was more complex, as

stereotypical behavioural gender norms were draw from both masculinity and femininity.

6.5(2) Original contributions to health and wellbeing practice

The primary contribution to practice is the development of a model that could be used in conjunction with the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel*. The model (p.204) is a visualisation of how identity is weaponised against gay women's relationships that are characterised by DVA. It is a heuristic device that was created based on analysis of the data and extant literature. It is not intended to be exhaustive nor does it claim to be empirically derived (see section 3.5(5)). It is intended as a tool to assist in understanding behaviours as identity abuse as part of a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviours. Explanatory notes for the model are provided as Appendix 14. Using it in conjunction with or following the *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel* assists in identifying other facets of the abuse experienced. It may also have potential use with other intersectional identities but this would need testing through a research process (see section 6.6).



Model 2: The Weaponisation of Intersectional Identities (SSDVA)

The theoretical contributions made by my study are also of use to practitioners to underpin and inform their practice, particularly relating to assessment. This may assist in ameliorating some poor risk assessment as was found by Donovan and Rowlands (2011). The study will be published through papers (conference and journals). Training can be developed as a result of insights developed and offered to agencies. I think it is imperative that the study is disseminated through community LGBTQ organisations and student societies. There are a number of practical applications in an educational setting which are discussed in 6.5(1).

The key message of this study is that practitioners and educators are limited in their ability to resource, raise awareness of, and assist those experiencing domestic violence and abuse in same sex relationships between women without knowledge that lived experience and the nuances of those experiences based on the identity of the victim/survivor. It is hoped that where victim/survivors have the courage to seek help this research may be able to inform the assessment process. If services are to be more inclusive, this learning is vital.

6.6 Recommendations for future research

There are a number of directions possible for future research stemming from this study. Firstly, it would be possible to re-analyse the data with focus on the impact of gender and gender stereotypes, which would add to the body of work developed by Barnes (2013b) in order to develop any

further available insights. Whilst sexuality was key in this study and therefore the first site of analysis, an analysis of this may bring new insights. It is recognised that heteronormativity and gender norms are intertwined. In the context of this study, it was felt that sexuality held primacy over gender, but it may be a fruitful furtherance. It would be useful to undertake confirmatory research with gay women more widely to test the outcomes of this study and assess the transferability of the model.

It may yield interesting results to repeat this research through sampling other different stratified populations to explore the impact of other intersections (for example, ethnicity and disability) using the same model of analysis that draws upon Crenshaw (1991) and McCall (2005). This need not be limited to a same sex population. In an era of perceived 'sameness', sameness is potentially the best place from which to start the examination. This enables the differences of experience based on socio-cultural norms, representation and structural difference (Crenshaw, 1991) to be extrapolated and examined. It is important to consider the impact of generation in future research. It would be useful to gain a picture of the experiences of younger gay women, particularly given the deepening of assimilation. Finally, from a purely methodological perspective, the development of collaborative autoethnographies or participatory action research with intersectional approaches would seem to be useful and may lead to new knowledges and greater community awareness and involvement.

6.7 Recommendations for policy

I recognise that heterosexual women are the largest group of people affected by DVA and so no recommendation I would make would seek to decentre them. However, policy actors it appears in widening definitions of DVA have obscured through proliferation; categories add to obfuscation and dis-ease with terminology (Richardson and Monro, 2012). Focus on equity rather than equality would be a more reasoned starting position. The landmark Domestic Violence bill has fallen and it is unclear what its future is. As stated in the introduction to this research, there are few references in government strategy to LGBT victim/survivors of DVA (Barnes and Donovan, 2018). It would appear that a first stage approach would be to rectify this position. It would subsequently be useful to ensure that metrics were available to locate the scale of the problem, but this is complex. However, under-reporting is likely to remain the most significant issue in this regard. Issues concerning under-reporting will not be resolved without social and cultural change. The education of formal agencies (such as the police and courts) and service providers is therefore imperative. Unless we culturally and socially begin to privilege respectful relationships, the outlook is bleak.

6.8 Closing remarks

In peroration, I offer that I entered into this study asking a question about how the world around me impacted on my experiences. I recognised that my experience was both simultaneously individual and collective which led

me to an insider-outsider position (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Through conducting this study, I have been able to identify how power operates around identity, DVA, (not) help-seeking and surviving and exiting relationships characterised by DVA. Identifying the material impacts of ideology through primary research is not an easy task and requires convolutions but speaking truth to power was the initially unconscious aim. I suspended those feelings (as much as is possible) and allowed themes to emerge from the data. This enabled me to process things in a different way.

The critical juncture came when, in coding, I used the *COSHAR Power and Control Wheel*. In certain individual areas I could see patterns involving the use of other people and a picture began to emerge across four areas. These came to form the four tactical areas in *The Weaponisation of Identity Model*. The use of intersectionality and standpoint theory enabled the examination of material impacts. The process of writing sharpened the analysis further still. There are areas which I feel would benefit from further examination from within the existing data (see section 6.5), particularly gender. When we think of intersectional approaches, I think it is important that we do not forget the original contributions of Black feminists. Intersectionality has become a popular approach and often ethnicity is extricated. Intersectionality has been used as a framework without consideration of its antecedents. This could be argued to be the beginnings of an appropriation of intersectionality. It could be argued this study is no exception to this

because it is the story of *white* women. Bowleg (2008, p.323) articulates my position most eruditely when she comments:

> … the novel perspectives gained from intersectionality research can advance knowledge, inform interventions, and shape public policy in ways that benefit women *like Black lesbians and all others who fall through the "women and minorities" gap* [emphasis mine].

This study has presented stories of women that fell down that gap.

If we fail to pay heed to the 'all others', then we fall into an assimilationist trap. We end up adding to the assimilation of white gay women in ways that result in silencing their abuse. Intersectionality is historically and inexorably intertwined with feminism which, in turn, is about the liberation of women from patriarchy. We should resist attempts to create any enemies within. This does not, of course, mean we should ignore the impact of other intersections such as ethnicity, class and disability, indeed, we must examine them. We should, however, consciously attempt to avoid additive approaches that become unhelpful and ultimately an assimilationist tool. My final words, then, would warn that gay white feminist women must not fall foul of the patriarchal and neoliberal trap that seeks to appropriate our identities to the mainstream in order to support hate, and the perpetuation of hate against others. Instead, we must, in the words of the canonical Black feminist, Collins (1989), seek to develop, in all others, 'oppositional consciousness' because compliance never leads to liberation.

* * *

Epilogue: The participants' present contexts

Loz is now in a new civil partnership and living happily with her wife and dog. She maintains a good relationship with her mum and dad. Rachel is living happily with her partner and her son. Stella is happily single and has no plans to enter into a relationship any time soon. She has a new house and is enjoying having it just as she wants it. Thank you for sharing our stories.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Indicative behaviours in COHSAR Power and Control Wheel

(Source: Donovan and Hester, 2014, p.206-209)

Concentric circles	Explanations
Relationship Rules	In most abusive relationships, regardless of gender or sexuality, there are two key relationship rules that emerge as a result of the abusive behaviour and expectations of the abusive partner. 1. That the relationship is for them and on their terms. This means that they expect, or the impact of their behaviour is that they are able, to set the terms for the relationship and see it as a vehicle for meeting their own needs. They expect their partner to accept and comply with the terms and are prepared to use a range of abusive behaviours (see the spokes of the COHSAR Wheel) which both alert their partners to the rules and can be used to punish her partner when they do not comply. Being able to set the terms also means that the abusive partner is able to change their mind, be unpredictable or to state that they do not want to take any responsibility for anything in the relationship (so for example, they might not do paid work, they might refuse to take a share of the household duties, childcare etc or they may explain that they have a fear of commitment). 2. The victim/survivor is responsible for the relationship and for the abusive partner. This means that the victim/survivor is blamed when things go wrong, including when violence/abuse occurs; that they are responsible for 'managing' the abusive partners' relationships with family of origin, other friends, etc, including protecting them from others' negative criticism about their behaviour; provide support and care for the abusive partner when they are upset by the outside world, their employer, their difficulties coping with life, and even after they have been violent and/or abusive. Because the victim/survivor is held responsible for the relationship abusive partners are often extremely reluctant to let go and employ different ways of persuading victim/survivors to stay or return to the abusive relationship to punish them for leaving/staying away. Conversely, it is also the case that victim/survivors might experience themselves as emotionally 'stronger' and their abusive partners and often believe that they should take care of them (see practices of love).

Concentric circles	Explanations
Power and control	The range of behaviours that are employed by abusive partners are all intended to exert power and control over the victim/survivor so that the relationship rules are understood and complied with; including punishment for breaking the rules
Practices of love	Abusive partners might engage in practices of love which act to confuse the victim/survivor about what is happening in the relationship, how do you understand it and how to recognise and name their experience as DVA. Many abusive relationships are not experienced negatively all of the time. Very often abusive relationships can have 'happy' periods or times when victim survivors feel that they are loved and needed by an abusive partner. In this way expressions of love can in themselves form part of the violence/abuse as they confuse, manipulate and act to glue victim/survivors into abusive relationships. 1. Declarations of love: abusive partners might declare their love for a partner especially when their partner is thinking about/ threatening to and/or actually leaving. This kind of declaration is often accompanied by: 2. Expressions of need/neediness: abusive partners talk about why they behave the way they do in an effort to elicit forgiveness, care and support and love from their partner; and to persuade them to stay in the abusive relationship. These revelations often lead to: 3. Expectations of care: abusive partners often elicit feelings in victim/survivors that obligate them to respond to declarations of love and expressions of need/neediness their abusive partners reveal. This compounds their sense that they are responsible for looking after their abusive partner and that they are the emotionally 'stronger' partner he should protect and remain loyal to their partner.

Concentric circles	Explanations
Intersecting identities	Abusive partner and victim/survivors rarely identify in simple ways. Most experience the world in ways that are shaped by how their identity is assumed to be by those around them in their family/friendship networks as well as by professionals in more formal contexts; and by how they identify themselves. This can include their 'race' and/or ethnicity, their age, their social class, their gender, their faith and whether they are able bodied or not. When working with victim/survivors and/or abusive partners being aware of what intersecting identities they inhabit will help understand: 1. How they perceive their behaviours, including their moral code and/or whether they normalise their behaviours 2. Their likely support networks and whether these might reinforce abusive relationships or support non-abusive relationships 3. Their readiness to seek help and degree of trust they might place in different sources of help.

Spokes in the P&C wheel	Indicative Examples
Coercion and threats	Making and/or carrying out threats to hurt a partner; threatening to leave her/him, to commit suicide, driving recklessly to frighten her/him, making her/him drop charges, making her/him do illegal things.
Intimidation	Making her/him afraid with looks, actions, gestures, weapons; destroying his/her property/things; abusing pets.
Emotional abuse	Putting her/him down; making her/him feel bad about her/himself; calling her/him names; making her/him think she/he is crazy; playing mind games; humiliating her/him; making her/him feel guilty; undermining her/his sense of self so that she/he believes that she/he is incompetent, stupid, 'wrong', to blame; making her/him believe that she/he is lucky they are in a relationship with her/him.
Using isolation	Controlling what she/he does, whom they see and/or talk to, what she/he reads or watches on the television, looks out on the computer, and where she/he goes; limiting their contact with the outside world; using jealousy to justify their own actions.

Spokes in the P&C wheel	Indicative Examples
Minimising, denying and blaming	Making light of the abuse and not taking their concerns about it seriously; saying the abuse didn't happen, shifting the responsibility for abuse onto her/him, other external factors, or on your own problems (your substance use, own unhappy, abusive childhood etc).
Using children	Making her/him feel guilty about their children; undermining their parenting; using the children to relay messages; using visitation to harass her/him; threatening to take children away; telling lies to the children about her/him.
Economic abuse	Preventing her/him from getting or keeping a job; making her/him asking for money; giving her/him an allowance; taking their money; not letting her/him know about/have access to the household income; running up debts without their knowledge, (e.g. by not paying bills, taking out loans); making all big decisions about how money will be spent; refusing to get paid work and/or expecting her/him to support him/her.
Physical abuse	Snapping/pushing/shoving; physically threatening them; kicking/punching; restraining/holding them down/tying them up; stalking/following them; beating up; choking/strangling/suffocating; locking them out of the house/room; hitting them with an object/weapon; biting; abducting them and keeping them somewhere against their will.
Sexual abuse	Persuading them to have sex for the sake of peace; touched them in ways that causes fear/harm/alarm/distress; forcing into sexual activity, including rape, forcing them to watch or an act pornography; hurting during sex; disrespecting 'safe' words/boundaries; sexually assaulting/abusing; refusing requests for safe sex.
Entitlement abuse	Treating her/him like a servant; making all the big decisions; being the one to define roles in the relationship (of women and men; or how partners in same sex relationships should act); using religious faith as a justification for inequalities in the relationship; claiming that their behaviour is normal and that 'everyone else' would agree.
Identity abuse	Threatening to out or actually outing their sexuality, gender (or birth gender) identity or HIV status to their employer/colleagues, faith community, family of origin, children's services; undermining the sense of self as a woman, man, lesbian, gay man, bisexual woman or man, a trans-woman or man; controlling what she/he looks like,

Spokes in the P&C wheel	Indicative Examples
	what clothes she/he wears, what hairstyle she said he has, her/his 'look' and behaviours; threatening to or withdrawing their medication, hormones, physical care supports; refusing her/him money for the costs of their gender transition.

Appendix 2: Advertisement

Due to the rules of the group no screenshot was taken of the advertising post, but the wording of the post was:

Have you suffered from domestic violence and abuse in a previous relationship with a female partner? Would you be interested in taking part in a research project that explores gay women's perspectives on seeking help from within an abusive relationship? The research will look at how our personal and cultural experiences shape how and when we ask for help and from whom we ask for help. It focuses on how we survived our experiences. Please feel free to send me a PM if you are interested and would like more information. You need to have been separated from your partner for over 12 months to take part and no longer be in contact with them.

N.B. The use of the word 'gay' within this particular group's culture is not seen in any way as excluding and is the preferred term in the group for definition of same sex relationships.

Appendix 3: Ethical approval

Monday 8th August 2016

Vik Kelly-Teare
University of Wolverhampton
FEHW

Dear Vik (Dr Pauline Fuller)

Re: Discursive and emic perspectives: Seeking help for domestic violence and abuse (DVA) from within submitted to the Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing Ethics Sub-Committee Board (Health Professions, Psychology & Social Care)

Upon review by the Chair of the Ethics Committee your resubmitted Research Proposal was passed and given full approval (**Code 1 - Pass**). You are free to continue with your study. We would like to wish you every success with the project.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Chair – School Ethics Committee

[redacted]

Chair – Ethics Panel

Appendix 4: Moderator letter

May 2016: Version 1

Dear Moderator,

Title of Project: Discursive and emic perspectives: Seeking help for domestic violence and abuse (DVA) from within same-sex relationships between women.

I am writing to you to ask your consent to recruit participants through your group to a research project, which I am conducting as part of a Professional Doctorate in Health and Wellbeing at the University of Wolverhampton. I enclose a participant information sheet which explains more about the project. Taking part in the project would involve interactive interviews with participants who volunteer to as a result of reading a post online in the group. I would invite potential participants to respond to me via private message about the study if they are interested and meet the criterion. Participants will be well informed about their rights to withdraw and I will ensure that they realise that their usage of the group is not in any way affected by a decision either to take part or to withdraw from the study.

Participants would be asked to take part in interactive interviews via Skype and will have the opportunity afterwards to look at the written transcripts of the interviews and comment on the analysis of them. All information about the group and individual's participation in this study will be confidential (through the use of pseudonyms etc). The transcriptions of the interviews will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and any paper files used in the process will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Only my doctoral supervisors and I will have access to the information. It is unlikely that any group member or the group will be identifiable in any publication or report, as all identifying information will be removed. The data will be kept for five years after interviews.

If you feel that you are able to consent to the recruitment from within the group to this project, please indicate on the attached consent form and return this to me via email. Equally, if you have any further questions about the research before making a decision, please do not hesitate to get in touch using the contact details on the participant information sheet. If you would prefer not to be involved, please destroy/ignore this email and I will not contact you further in any way. Thank you for taking the time to consider this request.

Yours sincerely,

Vik Kelly-Teare
Researcher

Appendix 5: Information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Discursive and emic perspectives: Seeking help for domestic violence and abuse (DVA) from within same sex relationships between women.

This project explores gay women's perspectives on seeking help from within an abusive relationship. It looks at how our cultural and personal experiences shape how and when we ask for help and from whom we ask for help. It focuses on how we survived our experiences.

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with your friends and whomever you consider to be family. Ask us if there is anything that you are not clear about or would like more information about. Please feel free to take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

We have known for quite some years that domestic violence and abuse is something that affects gay women as well as straight women (but it isn't spoken about much in the gay community). I am interested in studying how women survive their experiences and leave abusive relationships. Through my own experience and reading about domestic violence and abuse I realised that there are many things that affect women when they are making decisions about their lives. This study explores the issues around getting help. The aim of the study is to increase awareness of domestic violence and abuse and the complex issues it raises for gay women and to enable the subject of domestic violence to be discussed more widely in the gay community so that members of the community can help themselves. It may be used to inform policies of wider domestic violence agencies and enable them to be more gay friendly and approachable for gay women. It is envisaged that the project will be completed in about 2 years.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in this project because you have identified that you are interested in taking part from an online post in a group that you are an online member of. You have also identified that you have been out of the abusive relationship for some time and that you no

longer have contact with the person that you considered was abusive to you. If you choose to continue being involved with this project you will be one of 3 or 4 people involved in the study. I will also be involved in the study as a survivor of domestic violence and abuse in telling a story of survival.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form that you will also be given a copy of to keep. If you decide to take part you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Should you decide not to be involved, please be assured that it does not affect your membership of ***** online group or any of the support that you might get from there.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

If you decide to take part in the project you will be invited to have an interactive interview. The subject of the interview(s) will be 'surviving an abusive relationship'. It will be like a conversation with me, rather than me asking you questions and we will discuss your experiences. The interview will be confidential. The interactive interview would normally take about an hour and a half. You might then be asked to have a second interactive interview. Anything you say would be totally confidential and any notes made as a result of the interview would be destroyed afterwards. The interviews would take place via Skype at a time that is convenient to you and would be recorded on a digital voice recorder but destroyed after use.

A report will be written which combines the information you have given with the information of others, including me, so that people can see how the common issues affect us individually. You will have the opportunity to look at the written transcript of the interview and comment on the analysis of it. Once analysis begins following interviews it will not be possible to withdraw the information given but no direct quotes of yours will be published if you choose to withdraw at this stage. The report will focus on how we were able to survive your experiences and will focus on issues, such as homophobia or our fear of it, that make it difficult for women in our situation, together with any individual difficulties, to seek help.

What are the potential benefits and risks of taking part?

There is no individual benefit of taking part in this study. It is not going to make you famous or a lottery winner! Some people find the experience of being interviewed to be positive in that it helps them understand their own experience more and sharing their feelings does them good.

I hope to raise awareness of the issues in the LGBT community and provide some way forward for others stuck in the same situation. It is hoped that the study may assist helplines and other organisations in making their services accessible. If we can make a difference, however small, in terms of educating other LGBT people and LGBT organisations and people that work in the field of domestic violence and abuse and even if only one person has a better idea about how to extricate themselves from an abusive relationship then the work is worthwhile.

There should be no external risks in being involved in a project of this type. Your ex partner will not be named and there will be no identifying aspects of the relationship published. You can check this and have the final say in what is put in the project regarding your story. However, you should bear in mind that taking part in any research project of this kind could be upsetting. It may awaken unwanted memories that might affect how you feel. As you have been out of the abusive relationship for some time the impact of this might be lessened, but it may still be uncomfortable for you, for this reason you will be provided with information about getting help. If in an interview you remember things that are upsetting, I will ask you if you want to continue to participate in the interview. Any decision you make will be respected.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. All the information about your participation in this study will be kept confidential. The transcription of the interview you participate in will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and any paper files used in the process will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Only my PhD supervisors and I will have access to the information. You are unlikely to be identifiable in any publication or report as all identifying information will be removed but the report may contain anonymous quotes that you recognize as your own alongside quotes from other participants. The data (i.e. the transcripts but not the recordings) will be kept for five years after interview but I will always ask your consent to use any part of them again. A pseudonym will be recorded on any transcripts rather than your name so you won't be identifiable from it.

What will happen at the end of the research study?

At the end of the study the findings will be published in a thesis. Some of the findings may also be used as the basis of journal articles in academic journals. Some sections of the thesis might be published in a form that can be used by domestic violence and abuse agencies to help deliver services or assist service users. If you wish to have a copy of your interview transcript to keep, the finished research or any published materials arising from it, then please let me know and I will organise a copy for you.

What if I have a problem or concern?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak with the researcher or the research supervisor who will do their best to answer your question(s). Details of both are below.

Who has reviewed the study?

Every research project undertaken at the University of Wolverhampton has to be given approval by an Ethics Committee. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing Ethics Panel.

Contact for further information

Researcher name: Vik Kelly-Teare
Email address: [redacted]
Contact number: [redacted]

Supervisor name: Dr. Angela Morgan
Email address: [redacted]
Contact number: [redacted]

Thank you for taking part in this study.
Your contributions are highly valued.

Appendix 6: Email consent form (Moderator)

May 2016: Version 1

EMAIL CONSENT FORM (MODERATOR)

Title of Project: Discursive and emic perspectives: Seeking help for domestic violence and abuse (DVA) from within same-sex relationships between women.

Name of Researcher: Vik Kelly-Teare

Please mark boxes with an X

1. As an online group moderator for ****** group, I give permission for the researcher to recruit participants' from the group through posts on the group page about the study. ☐
2. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated May 2016 (version 1) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. ☐
3. I understand that the group's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent at any time, without giving any reason. ☐
4. I understand that participant data will be stored securely and confidentially and that participants' data and the group will not be identifiable in any report or publication. ☐
5. I understand that access to the data is restricted to the researcher and the researcher's doctoral supervisors. ☐
6. I understand that the researcher may wish to publish this study and any results found, for which I give my permission. ☐

Returning this form via email with your name and group name typed onto it will be considered to be in lieu of your signature:

.....	.....	.....
Name	Date	Signature

On behalf of ..... Group.

.....	.....	.....
Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 7: Participant letter

May 2016: Version 2

Dear …….

Title of Project: Discursive and emic perspectives: Seeking help for domestic violence and abuse (DVA) from within same-sex relationships between women.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project, which I am conducting as part of a Professional Doctorate in Health and Wellbeing at the University of Wolverhampton. I enclose a participant information sheet, which explains more about the project. Taking part in the project will involve interactive interviews. The subject of the interview(s) will be 'surviving an abusive relationship'. It will be like a conversation with me, rather than me asking you questions and we will discuss your experiences. The interview will be confidential.

The interactive interview would normally take **at least an hour**. Anything you say would be totally confidential and any notes made as a result of the interview would be destroyed afterwards. The interviews would take place via Skype at a time that is convenient to you. You will have the opportunity afterwards to look at the written transcript of the interview and comment on the analysis of it. It is probable that you will be asked or might want to have second interactive interview so that you can be give comments on the analysis of your interview and find out where the research is going. However, you are able to consent to just one interview and have the right to refuse a second interview. Even after the interviews you might decide that you don't want to be involved at all and you have the right to withdraw from the project. If you withdraw after the first interview you can choose what, if any, of the information you have given will be used in the project. However, once analysis begins, following interviews, it will not be possible to withdraw the information given (as it will already have been added to the analysis in an anonymous way) but no direct quotes of yours will be published if you withdraw at this stage. A report will be written of all of the findings and will replace all names with pseudonyms so that you cannot be identified.

If you feel that you would like to be interviewed, please indicate on the attached consent form and return this to me via email. If you would prefer not to be involved, please destroy/ignore this letter and I will not contact you further in any way. If you decide not to be involved or to withdraw at any time, I would like to assure you that no one else will be told about your decision not to be involved and it will not in any way effect your continued use of /or any online support that you may receive in ***** online group.

Yours sincerely,

Vik Kelly-Teare
Researcher

If you feel that you would like to contact my supervisor about the research or my role the contact details are:
Supervisor name: Dr. Angela Morgan
Email address: [redacted]
Contact number: [redacted]

Appendix 8: Email consent form (Participant)

May 2016: Version 1

EMAIL CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Discursive and emic perspectives: Seeking help for domestic violence and abuse (DVA) from within same-sex relationships between women.

Name of Researcher: Vik Kelly-Teare

Please mark boxes with an X

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated May 2016 (version 1) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time[1], without giving any reason. ☐
3. I understand that my data will be stored securely and confidentially and that I will not be identifiable in any report or publication ☐
4. I understand that the researcher may wish to publish this study and any results found, for which I give my permission ☐
5. I agree for my interview to be recorded on a digital voice recorder and for the data to be used for the purpose of this study. ☐
6. I understand and agree to being quoted anonymously in the study ☐
7. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Returning this form via email with your name typed onto it will be considered to be in lieu of your signature:

.....	.....	.....
Name	Date	Signature
.....	.....	.....
Researcher	Date	Signature

[1] **Once analysis begins following interviews it will not be possible to withdraw the information given but no direct quotes of yours will be published if you choose to withdraw at this stage.**

Appendix 9: Debriefing protocol

End of 1st interview schedule

(To be done verbally during Skype conversation)

Rough script:
We have reached the end of the interview.
How are you feeling?
[If required, offer appropriate verbal support and signpost to services]
Do you have any questions about the interview today or the study?
Have you had the opportunity to say everything that you wanted to say?

Inform the participant of what will happen next:

- They will receive a follow up email straightaway with helpline information
- They should expect a transcript (timescale informed)
- That they will be contacted for a **second interactive interview** which will check narrative accuracy and interpretation (seems realistic/ to describe their experiences / to do justice to their experiences) and discuss analysis after 1st interviews completed
- Remind them of contact information and rights to withdraw

To bring the participant back into current day:

Have you got anything nice planned for the rest of the day/evening?

- Thank them for taking part.

End of 2nd interview schedule

(To be done verbally during Skype conversation)

Rough script:
We have reached the end of the interview.
How are you feeling?
[If required, offer appropriate verbal support and signpost to services]
Do you have any questions about the interview today or the study?
Have you had the opportunity to say everything that you wanted to say?

Inform the participant of what will happen next:

- They will receive a follow up email straightaway with helpline information
- They should expect a transcript (timescale informed)
- That they will be contacted for a **follow up** which will check narrative accuracy and interpretation (seems realistic/ to describe their experiences / to do justice to their experiences) and to share final analysis and ascertain if seems realistic / to describe their experiences / to do justice to their experiences*.
- Ask them to consider (before I contact them to follow up) whether they would like a final copy of the research to keep.
- Remind them of contact information and (more limited) rights to withdraw.

To bring the participant back into current day:

Have you got anything nice planned for the rest of the day/evening?

- Thank them for taking part.

*It should be noted that multivoicedness is central to this autoethnographical account so no "one version" of analysis is taken as "truth". So checking in this instance is about authenticity of their account. The researcher will mindfully highlight any points of disparity in analysis within the thesis.

May 2016: Version 1

**** The email below will be sent to the interviewee **immediately** following the 1st interview via email so that they have any information to hand if they need any further support.****

Dear …….

Thank you for taking part in an interactive interview with me today. I hope that it was a good experience for you. Sometimes being involved in an interview of this type and about this subject matter can leave you with some uncomfortable feelings and I hope you felt I did my best to leave you feeling at ease.

Although we have talked about this at the end of the interview, I wanted to send you some information that may be of use to you if you subsequently feel that you need some support. Of course, you can talk about your concerns with friends, family and people you consider family, but if you would feel more comfortable talking to an agency the attached sheet of contacts may be useful to you.

Again, I would like to thank you for taking part in the study and sharing your experiences with me. I will be in touch with you as soon as possible with a transcript of the interview. I will ask you about a second interactive interview in which we will discuss some of my ideas about the themes that came out of the interview and anything you have thought of having had time to read your transcript.

Please don't forget that if you wish to withdraw for any reason just to let me know.
I look forward to talking with you again,

Best wishes,

Vik

May 2016: Version 1

**** The email below will be sent to the interviewee **immediately** following the 2nd interview via email so that they have any information to hand if they need any further support.****

Dear …….

Thank you for taking part in a second interactive interview with me today. I hope that it was a good experience for you. Although we have talked before and talked about this at the end of today's interview, I wanted to remind you of some information that I sent you before in case you have been left with any uncomfortable feelings or if you subsequently feel that you need some support. As always, I hope you felt I did my best to leave you feeling at ease.

Many people feel comfortable just talking to friends and/or family but if you would feel more comfortable talking to an agency the attached sheet of contacts may be useful to you.

Thank you for all the time that you have given to taking part in the study and sharing your experiences with me. I will be in touch with you as soon as possible with a transcript of your second interview. I will then follow that up as soon as possible by asking you if you feel that the account is accurate and reflects your experiences well. I will share some ideas with you about the project based on the second interviews and ask you how what you think and feel about it. I will ask you if you want me to get back in touch with you to share some final thoughts about the findings of the project.

I look forward to contacting you with the transcript from our second conversation,

Best wishes,

Vik

(Participant support information supplied with email 1 & 2 following interviews**)**

Some organisations that might be helpful to you:

0808 2000 247 Freephone 24 hr National Domestic Violence Helpline
Run in partnership between Women's Aid & Refuge

https://www.womensaid.org.uk or use this link to view their website.

Women's aid also run a Survivors' forum – details can be found on the website.

0808 2000 247 Freephone 24 hr National Domestic Violence Helpline
Run in partnership between Women's Aid & Refuge

https://www.womensaid.org.uk or use this link to view their website.

Women's aid also run a Survivors' forum – details can be found on the website.

Women's aid federation Northern Ireland:
http://www.womensaidni.org/get-help/domestic-sexual-violence-helpline/about-the-helpline/

And if you just want someone to talk to you can always call on the Samaritans:

There are lots more agencies out there that you can find by running a quick search on the web.

Details of an organisation **local to you** are:
Participant's local information will be placed here

Participant's local information will be placed here:

Don't forget you can also get online support in the ***** online group!**

Appendix 10: Tolich's (2010) Ten Foundational Guidelines for Autoethnographers

Consent

- Respect participants' autonomy and the voluntary nature of participation, and document the informed consent processes that are foundational to qualitative inquiry (Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, 2007).
- Practice "process consent," checking at each stage to make sure participants still want to be part of the project (Ellis, 2007).
- Recognize the conflict of interest or coercive influence when seeking informed consent after writing the manuscript (see Jago, 2002; Rambo, 2007).

Consultation

- Consult with others, like an IRB (Chang, 2008; Congress of Qualitative Inquiry).
- Autoethnographers should not publish anything they would not show the persons mentioned in the text (Medford, 2006).

Vulnerability

- Beware of internal confidentiality: the relationship at risk is not with the researcher exposing confidences to outsiders, but confidences exposed among the participants or family members themselves (Tolich, 2004).
- Treat any autoethnography as an inked tattoo by anticipating the author's future vulnerability.

- Photovoice anticipatory ethics claims that no photo is worth harming others. In a similar way, no story should harm others, and if harm is unavoidable, take steps to minimize harm.
- Those unable to minimize risk to self or others should use a nom de plume (Morse, 2002) as the default.
- Assume all people mentioned in the text will read it one day (see Ellis, 1995a).

Source: Tolich, M. (2010) A Critique of Current Practice: Ten Foundational Guidelines for Autoethnographers. Qualitative Health Research. 20(12), pp.1599-161.

Appendix 11: Search strategy

The initial search was primarily based topically on DVA, help-seeking and women's same sex relationships. An electronic search was conducted seeking peer reviewed primary research (with the timeframe 2000-present) via a number of databases available to the University of Wolverhampton (Academic Search Complete, CINAHL, King's Fund, JSTOR, Scopus, SocINDEX, and psychINFO). A narrow search was performed initially on search terms of 'lesbian domestic violence' AND 'help seeking' as this was the initial focus of the work. This yielded only 7 results (2014and then iteratively reviewed as described); not all of which were suitable for inclusion.

A decision was therefore made to undertake a comprehensive search on literature pertaining to same sex DVA without the limiting term of 'help-seeking' and time limiters to get the broadest view of the field. Search terms used were: 'domestic violence AND lesbian', 'domestic violence AND gay', 'lesbian domestic violence', 'lesbian domestic abuse', 'gay domestic violence', 'gay domestic abuse', 'lesbian intimate partner violence' and 'gay intimate partner violence'. This produced results in the hundreds. A hand search was also undertaken in the University of Wolverhampton library and online searches were performed using 'google' and 'google scholar' together with online repositories of charitable organisations. This search yielded only duplicates.

As my study needs to be of relevance to the UK, exclusion criterion was applied relating to location, but based on the regime type (Esping-Andersen, 1990) of countries not geography. Studies with population samples from the UK or countries with a (broadly) neoliberal regime type were kept. There were significantly more quantitative studies than qualitative studies available, with the focus often being on prevalence. This

is particularly apparent in studies emanating from the USA. Torrance (2008) argues that legislation and funding has meant that "scientific" research (about education), positivist in nature, is privileged over qualitative research in the US, with parallels in England and Australia. The same argument could most likely be applied to social science research; neoliberalism ontologically and epistemologically privileges positivist approaches and hegemonic patriarchal gender norms with associated family structures (Esping-Andersen, 1999). For this reason, research from these locations can be justifiably included as foundational to intersectional research in the UK context.

Exclusions were also made on the basis of relevance if: they did not exclusively relate to DVA, were exclusively about males, about perpetrators or based exclusively on particular stratified groups. Studies were then excluded on the basis of discipline and the paradigmatic position of the research. Studies with (some) consideration of help-seeking that were sociological, qualitative and mixed methods studies were kept. One study by St Pierre and Senn, (2010) which is psychosocial in its approach, was not ruled out due to its partial psychological focus, but rather, was included due to its strong focus on 'external barriers'. A snowballing strategy (Ridley, 2012) was utilised from the reference lists of these studies and a small number of author searches was undertaken (Ridley, 2012; Badenhorst, 2015 and 2018). This yielded 19 studies in total for inclusion in the review write up. A number of studies were not reviewed but were kept as relevant background literature mainly because of very limited relevance or currency.

Overview of the Studies

The papers that were identified as meeting the criteria were:
Giorgio, (2002); Donovan *et al*., (2006); Helfrich and Simpson, (2006); Irwin, (2006); Barnes, (2008); Donovan and Hester, (2008); Hardesty *et al*., (2008); Irwin, (2008); Brown and Groscup (2009); Barnes, (2010);

Donovan and Hester, (2010); St Pierre and Senn, (2010); Donovan, and Hester (2011a); Donovan and Rowlands (2011); Walters, (2011); McDonald, (2012); Barnes, (2013a); Barnes (2013b), and Todd (2013).

Some of the identified papers used data from the same research projects but with differing focus: Donovan *et al.* (2006), Donovan and Hester (2008), Donovan and Hester (2010), and Donovan and Hester (2011a); Irwin (2006) and (2008); Barnes, (2008), Barnes, (2010); Barnes, (2013a) and Barnes (2013b).

There were 12 research projects represented in total, eight of which were qualitative and four were mixed method studies as listed here:

1. Donovan *et al*., (2006); Donovan and Hester, (2008); Donovan and Hester, (2010); Donovan, and Hester (2011a);
2. Hardesty *et al*., (2008)
3. St Pierre and Senn, (2010);
4. Donovan and Rowlands (2011)

The papers, whilst being international, emanated from the following countries with a neoliberal regime type:
UK (n=10), USA (n=6), Australia (n=2) and Canada (n=1).

Giorgio's (2002) study was the only study that was autoethnographic. Its narrative and sociological approach and themes contained within the paper still have currency. This informed the decision to include it, although it sat outside the timeframe of the initial search. Giorgio (2002) situated herself as full participant amongst 11 lesbians who had experienced DVA and 10 DVA workers. Helfrich and Simpson (2006) also utilised staff (n=6) in their research project but did not interview any women who had experienced DVA in a same sex relationship. Irwin (2006; 2008), Barnes (2008) and McDonald (2012) are all qualitative papers based on in-depth interviews with victim/survivors.

The mixed methods research papers reviewed were St Pierre and Senn (2010) and Donovan *et al.* (2006) and Donovan and Hester (2008). St Pierre and Senn used a survey tool (n=280) and utilised The Barrier Model (Grigsby and Hartman) in analysis. Donovan *et al.* (2006) and Donovan and Hester (2008) papers were produced as part of a larger project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and drew data from research conducted over 2 years. This study comprised of a nationwide survey (n=800), 5 focus groups and 67 follow on semi-structured interviews. This project yielded a number of research papers, resulting in a seminal book (Donovan and Hester, 2014), which reports fully on the primary research and culminates in the COHSAR model, which is an update of the Duluth model.

As a result of the iterative process, Donovan and Hester (2014) and Donovan, Barnes, and Nixon (2014) was added to the literature review although the latter has so far produced only interim findings. Donovan and Hester's (2014) is to some extent beyond the scope of the review but was deemed imperative include as the study presented here draws on the arguments contained within it. Other books, particularly Renzetti (1992) and Ristock (2002), formed part of the background literature of the study but were not included in the thematically reviewed studies. Most of the studies selected for review drew data from individuals who had directly experienced abuse (self-identified) from within the LGBTQ community with others drawing data from staff in support agencies and systems.

References (not contained in main body of work)

Esping-Andersen, G. (1999) *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Grigsby, N., and Hartman, B.R. (1997) The Barriers Model: An integrated strategy for intervention with battered women. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training.* **34**(4), pp.485-497.

Torrance, H. (2008) Building confidence in qualitative research. *In* Denzin, N.K., and Giardina, M. (eds.) *Qualitative Inquiry and the Politics of Evidence*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, pp.55-79.

Search terms:

Search terms	Hits
Domestic violence AND lesbian	618
Domestic violence AND gay	619
Domestic abuse AND lesbian	334
Domestic abuse AND gay	338
Lesbian domestic violence	216
Gay domestic violence	170
Lesbian intimate partner violence	63
Gay intimate partner violence	57

Search terms - domestic violence AND lesbian:

Limiters	CINAHL with full text	SocINDEX	All databases
None	94	369	784*
Geography: UK and Ireland	6	0	6
Geography: USA	26	15	41
Geography: Australia	0	2	2
Geography: Australia, UK and Ireland	6	2	7
Geography: Australia, UK and Ireland, and USA	32	17	77
Geography: Australia, UK and Ireland, and USA and Canada	32	18	81

Search of methodologies 'hits':

Limiters	Empirical	Quantitative	Qualitative	Longitudinal Study	Meta-analysis
None Foreign language	50	16	14	1	1
Exclusive sample population e.g. Pacific Islanders	39	12	12	0	0
HIV status					
Gay males only					

Inclusion criteria at abstract review stage:

Help-seeking

Qualitative or mixed methods

Regime type comparable to the UK or UK based

Includes a lesbian population even as part of a mixed gender population, that is, gay and lesbian (if other requirements are met).

Appendix 12: Seminar Information

Lectures and Seminars 2017-2018

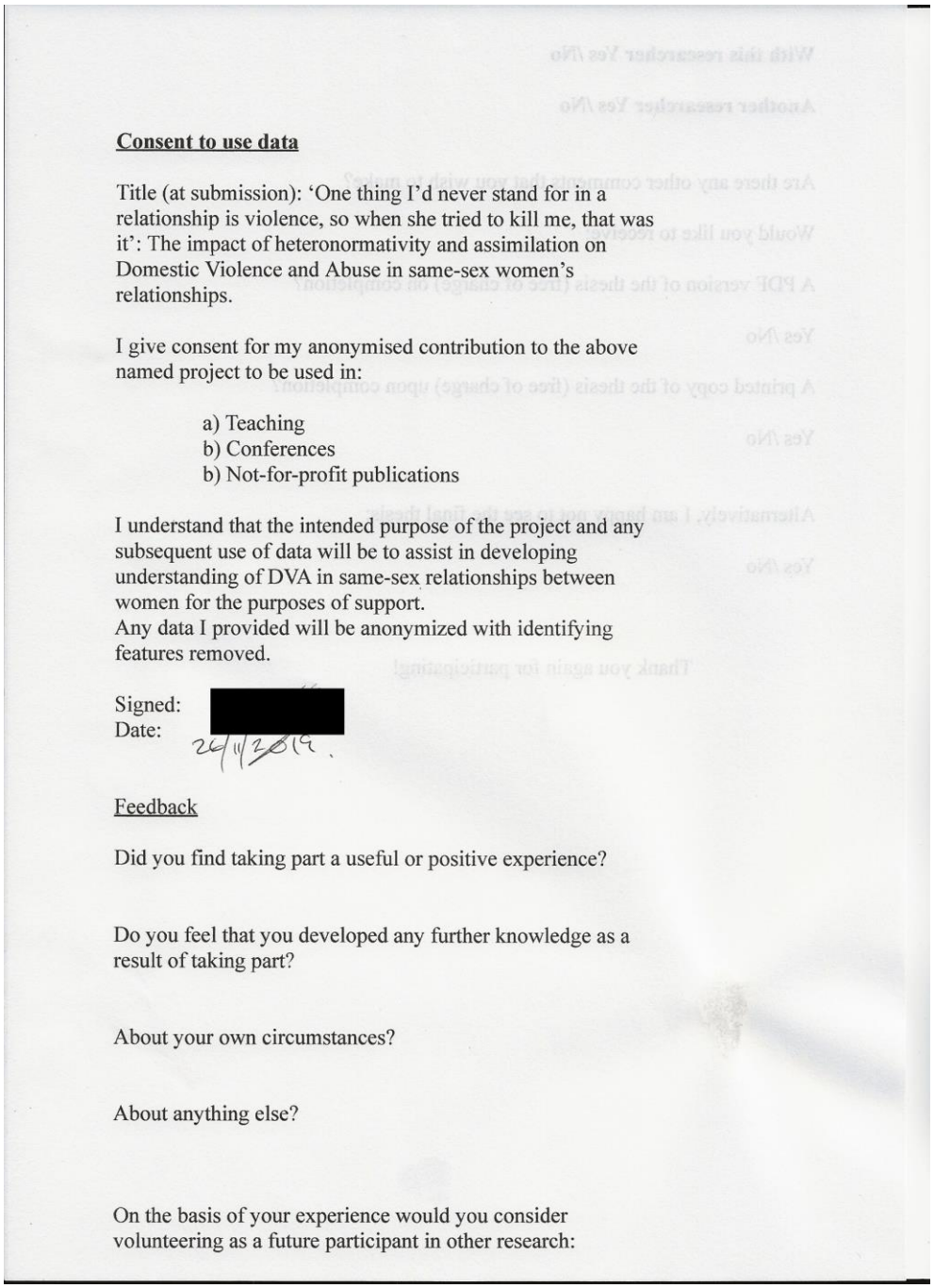
This series of seminars and events spans education, health and wellbeing, bringing you a variety of engaging speakers and experts from the University of Wolverhampton and many other UK universities.

Date/Time	Title	Location
Wednesday 29th November 2017 1.00pm - 2.00pm	**Title: Ethical challenges in autoethnography: Paradigm pitfalls** The seminiar will discuss the ethical challenges involved in aut ethnographical research. There will be particular consideration to the notion of 'relational ethics' including the relationship of the researcher to the research. There will be a performative dialogue presenting some of the pitfalls from the researchers' experiences of gaining ethical approval as well as a discussion of the uniqueness of autoethnographical research and its subjectivity. Speaker: Lucy Pursehouse and Vik Kelly-Teare	Wolverhampton City Campus Room: MC225, Millennium City Building

Appendix 13: Consents and feedback

Consents and Feedback

1. Stella – consent for ongoing use of data



Consent to use data

Title (at submission): 'One thing I'd never stand for in a relationship is violence, so when she tried to kill me, that was it': The impact of heteronormativity and assimilation on Domestic Violence and Abuse in same-sex women's relationships.

I give consent for my anonymised contribution to the above named project to be used in:

a) Teaching
b) Conferences
b) Not-for-profit publications

I understand that the intended purpose of the project and any subsequent use of data will be to assist in developing understanding of DVA in same-sex relationships between women for the purposes of support.
Any data I provided will be anonymized with identifying features removed.

Signed: [redacted]
Date: 26/11/2019

Feedback

Did you find taking part a useful or positive experience?

Do you feel that you developed any further knowledge as a result of taking part?

About your own circumstances?

About anything else?

On the basis of your experience would you consider volunteering as a future participant in other research:

2. Loz – Consent and Feedback

Consent to use data

Title (at submission): 'One thing I'd never stand for in a relationship is violence, so when she tried to kill me, that was it': The impact of heteronormativity and assimilation on Domestic Violence and Abuse in same-sex women's relationships.

I give consent for my anonymised contribution to the above named project to be used in:

a) Teaching
b) Conferences
b) Not-for-profit publications

I understand that the intended purpose of the project and any subsequent use of data will be to assist in developing understanding of DVA in same-sex relationships between women for the purposes of support.
Any data I provided will be anonymized with identifying features removed.

Signed: LOZ (anonymised)
Date: 24.11.2019

Feedback

Did you find taking part a useful or positive experience? Yes

Do you feel that you developed any further knowledge as a result of taking part? Yes

About your own circumstances?
It was useful as I have been able to spot things easier in relationships since with XXXXXXXX.

About anything else?
I have realised how common it is. I didn't realise that before.

On the basis of your experience would you consider volunteering as a future participant in other research:

With this researcher Yes

Another researcher Yes

Are there any other comments that you wish to make?

Thank you for picking me. It's a big issue, I didn't realise how big. Use my stuff it if will help other people.

Would you like to receive:

A PDF version of the thesis (free of charge) on completion?

No

A printed copy of the thesis (free of charge) upon completion?

Yes

Alternatively, I am happy not to see the final thesis:

Nah, send me a copy.

Thank you again for participating!

Appendix 14: The Weaponisation of Identities (SSDVA) Model

Drawing on the results and interpretations together with extant literature a provisional model has been created (which should be viewed in conjunction with Donovan and Hester's (2014) *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel*). The model also borrows terminology from the concept of *Johari Window* (Luft and Ingham, 1955) to encapsulate the sense of private and public selves through the category of 'the known self'. The model is not intended to be exhaustive or inclusive of all tactics and/or behaviours, conversely it is intended to illuminate and assist in positioning tactics utilised. The table below provides further explanation. Further research is recommended on identity to ascertain if the experiences of others would bear out the provisional visualisation (Collins, 2019).

Indicative patterns of behaviour in Weaponisation of Intersectional Identity (SSDVA) Table

Area	*Explanation*
Centre of Circle – Victim/survivor	The victim/survivor brings with them their intersectional identity. In this instance, it could be about gender and sexuality (and generation) but it can include class, (dis)ability, motherhood, et cetera. They may also bring their own relationship rules that in the case of this study would be 'don't beat and don't cheat. Practitioners should establish what the victim/survivor's relationship rules are to assist.
Concentric circle	In the circle surrounding the victim/survivor is the perpetrator. The perpetrator brings with them

surrounding the victim/ survivor	entitlement. They expect the relationship to be on their terms and it is entirely for them (Donovan and Hester, 2014). The victim/survivor is responsible for them and their care and care of the relationship (this conception is drawn from Donovan and Hester's (2014) *COHSAR Power and Control Wheel*)
Tactic domain concentric circle	In the next concentric circle there are four tactics domains. The two tactics domains on the left relate to the self (and the personal) and the tactics domains on the right are more outward facing (and public). However, there are no dividing lines between them as they are used in conjunction with one another.
Known self (victim/ survivor and how their own self-perception)	This domain can be used in two ways relating to private and public spheres of life. The first is through undermining the individual's sense of self. This can be through trying to control someone's image or undermining their identity as a gay woman or as a mother, their parenting skills et cetera. The known self can be used in conjuction with the other areas, for example, the use of intimacy can be used to undermine. For example, false allegations can be used to undermine and cause problems in public areas of a person's life and threats of false allegations, or threats revolving around an aspect of intimacy or the known public self can be utilised. These might be a threat to out, or threats to reveal some other known status that is not publicly known or known by family of origin such as status as married or in a civil partnership, the number of failed relationships a person has had,

	relationships that with people that they did not reveal and felt they need to keep secret, et cetera.
Intimacies	Intimacy can be used either through the withdrawal or forcing of intimacy. It can also be used as a threat or as the basis of false allegations. Threats of exposure of intimacies can be used in relation to the known self, i.e. to out in any sphere of life that the victim is not out in, or in conjunction with social media, for example threats to make public photographs or any aspect of the sexual relationship. Threats can be made to share intimacies with others as a way of controlling the individual and there can also be false allegations, of any sort, of impropriety involving infidelity.
False allegations	These can be used in conjunction with any other domain. False allegations may start as allegations made to the victim/survivor to confuse them and make them believe that they are abusive in the relationship. They can also be made outwardly. Threats to make false allegations can also be used as a tactic.
Threats	These can also be used in conjunction with any of the other domains. Where a threat is unsuccessful alone, or in relation to intimacy, it will often be used in conjunction with a false allegation. Use of the righthand side of the tactics' domains circle demonstrates the identity abuse becoming more public in its approach.

Outer concentric circle	This circle is based on 'accounts' given of the DVA in the relationship. These operate on a continuum from 'hidden' to 'weaponised'. Whilst a person might be experiencing severe abuse as the abuse becomes more public there is potential for external implications such as conflict with friends and family, problems with employment (through false allegation i.e. alleging that someone is abusive to their child, or alcohol or drug dependent to their employer. Making allegations that draw on stereotypes of the intersectional identity that may result in legal situations, for example, claiming that the victim/survivor has perpetrated abuse against them. Again, there is a continuum from public to private (as positioned above). On the basis of this study, perpetrators engage in discrediting projects with family and friends before involving formal agencies. It is not necessarily the case that this pattern would always be replicated. Hidden – The victim/survivor and the perpetrator may both attempt to hide the abuse that is taking place in the relationship. The abuse remains in a private sphere. Minimised - The victim/survivor and the perpetrator may make attempts to minimise the abuse that is taking place. Normalised - The victim/survivor and the perpetrator may draw upon heteronormativity and other cultural discourses to normalise the abuse to themselves and

	others. This also draws upon conceptions of same sex abuse as being situational couple violence and mutual (Irwin, 2008; Donovan and Hester, 2014). Justified - The victim/survivor and the perpetrator may make justifications for the abuse through heteronormativity and other cultural discourses, may try to explain the abuse through situational couple violence even though asymmetrical abuse is taking place. Weaponised – The victim/survivor is constructed as the perpetrator and the perpetrator claims victim/survivor status both within the relationship and to the outside world. The perpetrator may blame the victim/survivor for their own abusive actions. The victim/survivor may believe that it is their own fault or responsibility. Tactics around identity may be used to in relation to this around so called 'normal' behaviours for 'proper' or 'real' lesbians or women et cetera.
Personal to public continuum (top of model)	This shows an increasing level of outward exposure from personal experiences through to any type of formal proceeding, for example, the involvement of police and social services (in the case of a mother/carer). In the case of DVA between couples of the same sex, it has been demonstrated that friends are turned to more routinely than families (of origin), therefore, the category of friends is next to self in the continuum. However, the spheres of friends and family is interchangeable, depending on the victim/survivor,

	how they identify and the circumstances of their life. The proximal convergence zone is the zone in which the private world meets the public world. It is proximal in that persons in that zone are fluid in their allegiances, dependant on built relationships, understanding of the situation, identity of the victim/survivor and the victim/survivor's cognition and accounts of their circumstances.
Relationship dynamic (at bottom of model)	In the personal zone, the victim/survivor is positioned with the perpetrator in their intimate relationship. In the proximal convergence zone, the victim/survivor will either work harder at the relationship and/or resist control and coercion whilst the perpetrator works harder to exert control. This was evident in the cases of Loz and Rachel in this study. This is the zone in which friends' (community) and family (and sometimes wider social) perceive that abuse is situational couple violence. DVA may persist in this zone going around the cycle as depicted, or may become more public wherein the victim/survivor is likely also to be constructed as the perpetrator and the perpetrator as victim/survivor.
Linear colouration	The graduation of colour from white to red visually denotes the identity abuse movement from personal to public. The domains of shame to blame (on the left and the right respectively) indicate the shifting of responsibilities and transition from personal to public.